



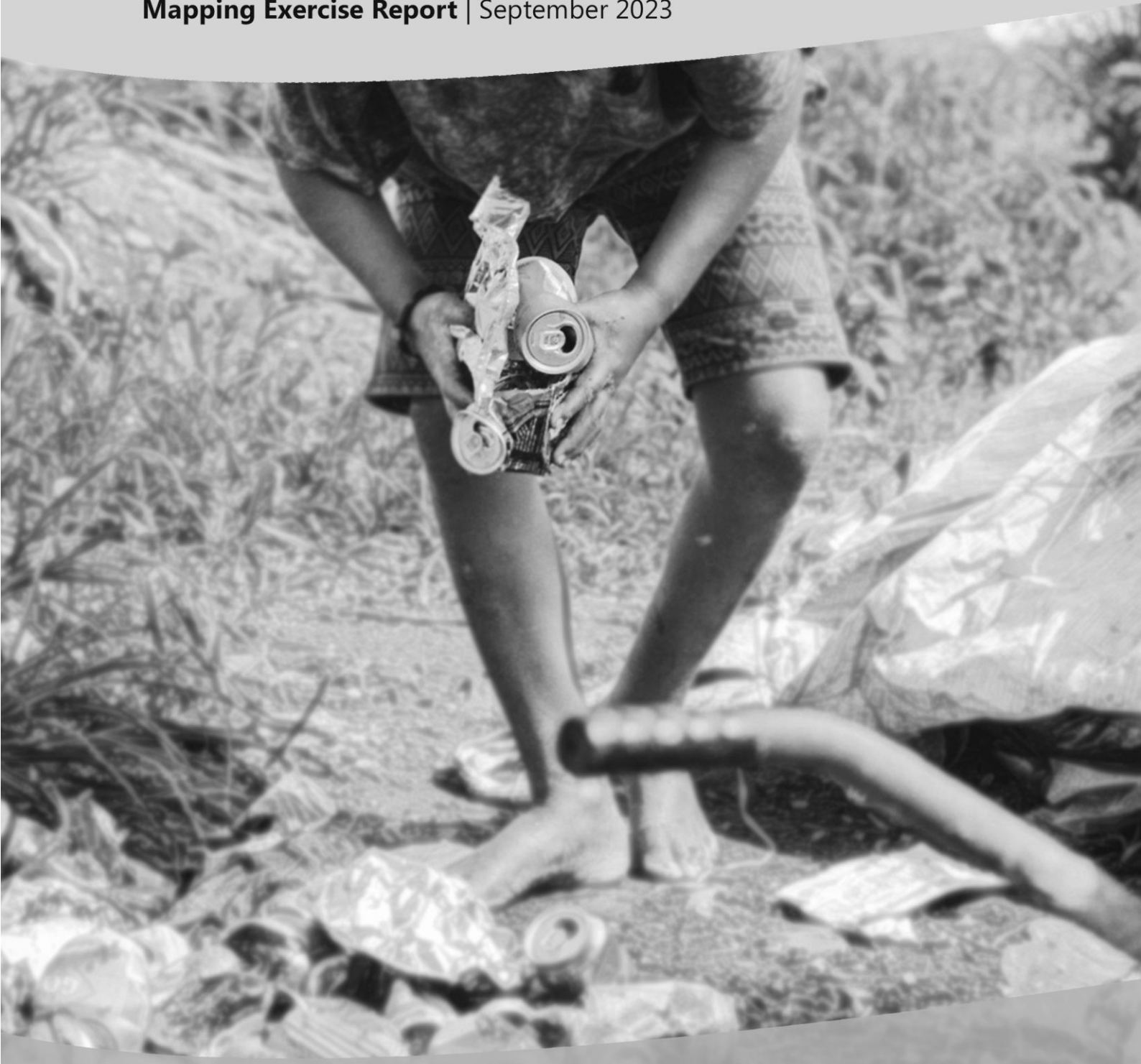
In Collaboration With:



PACIFIC RECYCLING FOUNDATION

National Mapping Exercise for Collection Pillars of Recycling in Fiji

Mapping Exercise Report | September 2023





(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

Proposed Citation

Pacific Recycling Foundation. (2023). *Mapping the Waste Collection Sector in Fiji: Understanding the Lives and Dynamics of CPRs*. September.

Report Overview:

The "Mapping the Waste Collection Sector in Fiji: Understanding the Lives and Dynamics of CPRs" report, prepared by the Pacific Recycling Foundation in September 2023, presents a comprehensive analysis of Fiji's waste collection landscape. Through meticulous mapping exercises and in-depth research, the report sheds light on the lives, challenges, and contributions of the CPRs. This report serves as a valuable resource for understanding the intricate dynamics of waste collection in Fiji, offering insights into the role CPRs play in the waste management ecosystem and their impact on sustainability and the local economy.

About WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing is a global research-policy-action network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. WIEGO builds alliances with, and draws its membership from, three constituencies: membership-based organizations of informal workers, researchers and statisticians working on the informal economy, and professionals from development agencies interested in the informal economy. WIEGO pursues its objectives by helping to build and strengthen networks of informal worker organizations; undertaking policy analysis, statistical research, and data analysis on the informal economy; providing policy advice and convening policy dialogues on the informal economy; and documenting and disseminating good practice in support of the informal workforce. For more information see www.wiego.org.

About Pacific Recycling Foundation: Pacific Recycling Foundation, an offshoot of Waste Recyclers Fiji Limited is a rights-based organization specially formed to raise awareness on the best practices of recycling and proper waste management and provide structured support to individuals and groups involved in informal waste picking in Fiji and the Pacific (in particular women and members of the LGBTQI+ community).

In many essences, the PRF is a reflection of all the struggles and challenges its commercial arm, WRFL encountered for three decades.

The PRF's key area of focus deals with changing the mindset and behaviour of our communities on the best practices of recycling through tailor-made programs as well as implementing waste management and recycling programs that have a monitoring and evaluation framework which collects data, provides feedback, and records lessons learned. This will contribute to the development of a core blueprint for other recycling projects in the region. The PRF is also engaging in studies and research work with its partners to find solutions and ideas on sustainable recycling, upcycling and downcycling projects for Fiji and the region, and the collection of recyclables from remote and maritime areas.

Through its advocacy work, the PRF is also trying to create knowledge of the environmental, economic, and social benefits of recycling.

Since 2019, the PRF has taken some strategic steps to lay the foundation for recycling and proper waste management at the grassroots level. This has been done through the PRF's tailor-made recycling programs for communities, schools, and at the corporate level.

This was also a period of listening, empowering, and amplifying the voices of those involved in informal waste picking, particularly the marginalized. The PRF through the support of its partners continues to work toward improving the working and living conditions of those involved in the informal waste collection sector.

The PRF is also working toward changing the landscape of waste management in Fiji holistically and through its "Look Beyond" movement-building approach, is working to ensure recycling and waste management solutions are for everyone and not based on social status, skin colour, ethnicity, and so forth. For more information, see <https://recyclingfoundation.org/>



MAPPING EXERCISE REPORT

Pacific Recycling Foundation

National Mapping Exercise for Collection Pillars of Recycling in Fiji

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Disclaimer: The information and findings presented in this mapping exercise report are based on data collected through interviews and surveys conducted in various regions of Fiji. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information, we cannot guarantee its complete accuracy or exhaustiveness. The report is intended to provide an overview of waste pickers' demographics, living conditions, and challenges, among other aspects, as observed during the mapping exercise. However, the dynamics of waste picking may vary over time and across different locations, and additional factors not captured in this report could influence the waste picker community. Readers are encouraged to use the information provided as a reference and consider other relevant sources when making decisions or formulating policies related to waste management and waste picker livelihoods. The authors and organizations involved in this mapping exercise report shall not be held liable for any consequences arising from the use or interpretation of the information presented herein.

Team

Director and Founder of Pacific Recycling Foundation

Amitesh Deo

Interviewers

Amitesh Deo, Dhanjay Deo, Vitila Sirivalu, John Wilson, Serafina Qalo, Reginald Kumar, Clint Wendt, Kelera Raliku, Aliti Cuatabua, Vinil Prasad

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Video Documentaries and Snapshots

Ravinesh Roshan

Media and Communications

Dhanjay Deo, Ranil Kumar

Report Compilation

Vinil Prasad



The mapping exercise team.

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

Meet the Team



"I was eager to embark on this journey and explore how we could provide structural support through the Foundation and collaborate with other supporting bodies. Additionally, we aim to lobby for assistance from the government to uplift the waste collection sector and improve the lives of CPRs. This mapping exercise offered a refreshing change from my daily desk work, allowing me to step into the field and gain first-hand experience of the waste collection sector. It was a fulfilling and enlightening experience, and I am committed to using the insights gained to make a positive impact on waste pickers' lives and the environment."

John Wilson, Project Manager at PRF

"The Mapping Exercise was a very life changing experience for me and everyone that was fortunate enough to be a part of it. My entire life, I am privilege enough to have those basic things that I often take for granted such as a roof over my head, a family to rely on, access to food and water, an education and other basic necessities that I needed in order to have a good life. There are many times when I take these blessing for granted and I fail to appreciate it. One of the greatest lessons that I have learnt from this mapping exercise is to always live my life with a grateful heart and never take my blessings for granted.

Before this mapping exercise I never knew of this world that existed right in front of me, the reality of the lives of those who rely on recyclables to earn a living, as a means of survival. Most of these individuals have gone through some form of trauma in life which have led them to this trade to put food on the table for their families. Despite all these challenges and trauma, I admire the compassion they have, and the resilience shown in their attitude and mindset.

I would also like to express my gratitude towards Amitesh and the PRF core team for giving me this amazing opportunity that I believe will go down in history as the first-ever group that created a platform for this marginalized groups to use their voice and be heard in the process when they are often being silenced by society."

Vitila Sirivalu, Project Officer at PRF



"It was a humbling experience to go to the homes and workplaces of the Collection Pillars of Recycling. It was a humbling experience simply to sit and meet such people who are working tremendously hard and in very dangerous and challenging conditions to put food on the table for their families.

It was also an emotional journey, where we broke down into tears on many occasions after hearing the stories and challenges and seeing the working and living conditions of the CPRs.

It was also a huge learning curve for the whole team. All of us went into this exercise having all necessities of life, which we take for granted many times, however, our exposure to these groups and their situations who have very limited or no access to some of the most basic needs has allowed us to come back with indelible learnings and memories.

A moment that I will never be able to forget and will remain captured in my heart is when I walked toward an elderly woman (mother of a CPR) who was sitting in front of her shack house which was in a very deplorable condition.



I could see my mother in her as her face was very similar to my mother's. I sat next to her, spoke to her, shared jokes and what I learned from her was that she was still happy with what she had and determined to keep persevering. I ate the most delicious corn at her place, which she broke into several pieces and offered to our seven-member team.

The Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector has been the most memorable accomplishment and experience of my career."

Dhanjay Deo, Communications Manager at PRF

"The mapping exercise was a completely new and refreshing experience for me, unlike any other project I have worked on. I had been eagerly looking forward to being part of this initiative, and it surpassed all my expectations. While my daily work involves dealing with hotels, resorts and other cooperate organizations, engaging with people from marginalized communities through this exercise taught me invaluable life lessons and deepened my appreciation for the little things in life. It was a humbling and eye-opening journey, and I am grateful to have been a part of it. I thank the team for braving this experience as it has been a great opportunity and a learning curve for all of us. "

Reginald Kumar, Project Officer – Monitoring and Evaluation at PRF





"I was truly grateful for the opportunity to be a part of the mapping exercise team. When the team needed an extra hand, I was called on board to contribute. Joining the team slightly later meant that I had some catching up to do regarding the protocols and processes, but with time, I managed to learn and adapt. While I made a few initial mistakes, the guidance and support of the team helped me navigate through. Looking back, I am extremely happy and proud to have been a part of this team. Not only did I learn a lot about my team members, but this experience also significantly altered my perspective on life."

Aliti Cuatabua, Stock and Administration Officer at Malhana Cloud Kitchen

"The mapping exercise for me was an opener and I was very blessed to be part of a very strong team. With so many people we met and so little they have but they still can smile and offer food and drinks to you without any hesitation. The Journey has taught me to be humble, appreciate the little things people do for me, and always stop to thank them. The highlight moment for me was how the little children with so less clothes on them and no shoes running around and enjoying life with their broken toys and so happy that they have a toy car in their hand not bothered that the car has two wheels missing yet they are making the most out of it. My children would throw away broken toys, but these kids are so happy to take these toys from the dumps and be so joyous about finding them.

I want to thank PRF and Amitesh boss for this opportunity and only wish that everyone in the organization could experience what the mapping team went through as they will all be looking at life very differently by now."

Clint Wendt, Group Operations Manager at Waste Recyclers (Fiji) Ltd



" I've covered a wide range of stories, but the mapping exercise in the Northern Division was a truly eye-opening experience. Working closely with Director Amitesh Deo and Project Manager John Wilson, I was thrust into a world I hadn't encountered before – the waste collection sector. My usual role of reporting took

a backseat as I engaged directly with waste pickers and their challenges. These individuals, who often go unnoticed, shared their stories with me, revealing the hurdles they overcome every day. It was more than just a project; it was a journey of discovery. I found myself gaining a fresh perspective on the communities I write for, and my interactions with waste pickers enriched my understanding of their lives. This experience wasn't just about documenting; it was about connecting with people, hearing their voices, and shedding light on their struggles. As a volunteer, this endeavor has redefined how I approach my work, reminding me of the power of stories to bring about change and empathy."



Serafina Qalo, Trustee for The Pacific Recycling Foundation

"This mapping exercise has taught me a lot. To actually sit down with the CPR's and hear their stories was a life changing and eye-opening experience for me. Most days I would hold back my tears and only wished I had all the resources in the world to help each and every one of them. One of the most important lesson I learnt was gratitude.

Most of us which I count myself in, would complain of the things we possess and not appreciate it and also demand for unnecessary things but from this mapping exercise, I have learnt to be always grateful of everything and even the tiniest things we have as some of our families out there do not have what we have, simply to always cherish every moment and what triggered me was that no matter what they face or the struggles they go through, they would always show a smiling face and treat us wholeheartedly.

Some of the stories would relate to me while others would relate me to my family especially my grandparents and somehow these stories have somehow molded me to become a better person. Day 1 of the mapping exercise, I wasn't really sociable with the team since I was really shy but going on to Day 3 till today, the bond shared between me, and the team would be one that I would always cherish and will never forget. This experience has also opened barriers for me and one that I feel proud to be part of."

Kelera Raliku, Volunteer – Student at The University of the South Pacific



"As the owner of Vivid Media, my photography career has led me to various events and introduced me to people from diverse backgrounds. Despite capturing numerous experiences and journeys, this mapping exercise presented a unique opportunity. It marked my first time meeting and documenting the stories of individuals from marginalized communities. While I had visited many of these areas in the past, this experience provided me with a new perspective that I had never seen before. I am immensely grateful to the Pacific Recycling Foundation for allowing me to join this journey. It has not only inspired me to think creatively about how I can contribute more to these individuals but has also stirred a renewed sense of purpose in my work. The stories I've captured during this exercise will forever remind me of the strength and resilience of waste pickers in Fiji."



Ravinesh Roshan, Director of Vivid Media

About the Author



Vinil Vivek Prasad is a Recycling Advocate and a Research Officer at the Pacific Recycling Foundation (PRF). He holds a Bachelor of Engineering (Mechanical) with Honours from the Fiji National University. His journey in waste management and recycling began during his final year of studies when he started working part-time at PRF and Waste Recyclers Fiji Limited.

Currently aged 23, Vinil is actively involved in various research projects at PRF, focused on finding sustainable recycling and upcycling solutions for Fiji and the region, including collecting recyclables from remote and maritime areas. His dedication to innovation and problem-solving fuels his eagerness to address waste management challenges and make a positive impact on the environment and communities.

Participating in the first mapping exercise in the Pacific Region, Vinil had doubts and uncertainties at the beginning. However, with the unwavering support of his team, he embraced the journey, documenting heart-touching stories and eye-opening events that changed his perception of life. The experience taught him to be appreciative and find joy in life's simple pleasures.

Throughout the mapping exercise, Vinil embarked on a journey that took them to various places, engaging him with the lives of CPRs and witnessing the challenges they endure. Despite the hardships, Vinil was deeply moved by the unwavering spirit and resilience of these individuals. He acknowledges that this report is an important milestone for the waste collection sector, shedding light on the realities faced by CPRs and highlighting the need for support and recognition from policymakers. Vinil emphasizes that this comprehensive report should serve as a vital resource for policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of the lives of the CPRs' and enable them to implement effective measures that uplift and empower these individuals and the organizations dedicated to waste management and recycling.

Vinil expresses gratitude to the management of Pacific Recycling Foundation for entrusting him with the opportunity to lead the team and document the findings and stories related to the waste collection sector of Fiji. The journey was transformative, as what began as self-doubt turned into self-realization and a character-building experience for the young Recycling Advocate.

Acknowledgments

In embarking on the journey of the mapping exercise, we have been fortunate to receive the support, guidance, and assistance of many individuals and organizations. As we present this report, we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to each of them:

First and foremost, our sincere thanks go to WIEGO for providing us with the opportunity to undertake this crucial initiative.

To the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), we extend our appreciation for the valuable counseling support provided to both our team and the CPRs. Your commitment to providing guidance and addressing the needs of CPRs referred to your organization is commendable and has been a cornerstone of this project.

Our gratitude also extends to Avis Rentals, whose generous provision of rentals ensured the smooth navigation of our journey. The logistical support you provided played an integral role in our successful execution.

FMF, your thoughtful provision of sustenance was instrumental in nourishing the CPRs we engaged with during this endeavor. This gesture not only underscored the spirit of collaboration that guided our efforts but also showcased your commitment to the well-being of the CPRs we aimed to support. Your contribution was a meaningful addition to our initiative, reflecting the collective determination to create a positive impact.

We extend our appreciation to Tourism Fiji for their generous assistance, covering the air travel costs for the team traveling from Viti Levu to Vanua Levu to conduct the mapping exercise. Their support has enabled us to bridge distances and foster collaboration seamlessly.

We also express our gratitude to the Fiji Cancer Society for their review of our questionnaire, ensuring its clarity and effectiveness.

We extend our gratitude to the Department of Environment (DOE) for their unwavering commitment to environmental conservation and their guidance that significantly enriched the outcomes of this project.

To all the municipal councils that stood by us and extended their support, we offer our heartfelt acknowledgment. Your partnership has been crucial in facilitating our work.

We are indebted to the PRF team and volunteers who poured their dedication, time, and energy into this initiative. Your collective efforts have breathed life into this report.

Furthermore, we acknowledge Vivid Media for their unwavering optical support, capturing the essence of our journey through its lens.

Also, we are also grateful to all of our other partners and countless community members, local leaders, organizations, and concerned citizens who supported us throughout this journey. Their insights, guidance, and encouragement have been invaluable in shaping the direction of this initiative and strengthening its impact. The collective efforts of these unsung heroes have reinforced our commitment to fostering sustainable waste management practices and improving the well-being of CPRs in Fiji.

Each of you have played a vital role in turning our vision into reality. Your support has not only enriched this report but has also fueled our commitment to driving positive change in waste management and the lives of the CPRs in Fiji.

Forward



It is with great pride and a sense of purpose that I introduce this comprehensive report on the mapping exercise of the waste picker communities in Fiji, an initiative undertaken by the Pacific Recycling Foundation (PRF). The journey that led to the creation of this report was not only about uncovering the realities faced by waste pickers in our nation but also about acknowledging their invaluable contributions to our society.

The waste picker communities, often operating at the fringes of our waste management system, play a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of our environment and the betterment of our communities. Their labor, resilience, and resourcefulness are undeniable forces that drive the wheels of recycling and contribute to a cleaner and healthier Fiji. Yet, their stories and challenges remain largely untold.

This report stands as a testament to our commitment to shedding light on these often-hidden narratives. Through meticulous data collection, intimate conversations, and firsthand experiences shared by our dedicated team, we have endeavored to provide a comprehensive picture of the lives, aspirations, and hardships faced by these individuals across Fiji.

The insights gleaned from this mapping exercise present us with a unique opportunity to drive positive change. By understanding the barriers, they encounter, the discrimination they endure, and the potential they possess, we are equipped to forge a path towards more inclusive waste management practices. This report is not just a document; it is a call to action, an invitation to collaborate, and an embodiment of our dedication to sustainability and social equity.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the entire team at PRF and to all our partners who are acknowledged in the report for your unwavering commitment to this cause has brought this report to fruition. To the waste pickers who opened their lives and shared their stories, your resilience and determination are inspiring. As we move forward, may this report serve as a catalyst for change, a guiding light that propels us toward a future where waste pickers are not just seen but celebrated for their invaluable contributions to our society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amitesh Deo', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Amitesh Deo

Director/CEO

Pacific Recycling Foundation

Executive Summary

The present report focuses on the mapping exercise of CPRs in Fiji, conducted by the Pacific Recycling Foundation in collaboration with **Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)**. The study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of waste pickers' lives, dynamics, and operating conditions in Fiji. Through rigorous data collection and analysis, the report sheds light on the challenges faced by waste pickers, their contributions to the waste management system, and potential pathways to improve their livelihoods.

The report reveals that waste pickers in Fiji play a critical role in the informal waste management sector. They are involved in various activities, including collecting glass and PET bottles, scrap metal, and waste from dumpsites, public, and commercial spaces. Waste picking serves as one of the few livelihood options for many marginalized individuals, such as those orphaned at a young age or facing financial constraints due to poverty and lack of educational opportunities.

The motivations driving individuals to become waste pickers vary, with some following family traditions, while others are attracted by the flexibility and adaptability of this occupation. However, waste pickers encounter numerous challenges, including social isolation, discrimination, safety concerns, and limited access to basic necessities and essential services. Elderly abuse is a prevalent issue, particularly impacting elderly waste pickers who face neglect and abandonment.

To address these challenges, the report puts forth a range of recommendations. These include the implementation of safety training and awareness programs, community policing initiatives, and crisis intervention support to enhance safety and security for waste pickers. It also emphasizes the need for community awareness campaigns to challenge stigma and discrimination and promote empathy and understanding towards waste pickers' contributions.

Additionally, the report advocates for improved access to education for waste picker children and increased social welfare support to mitigate the impacts of poverty and provide essential services to waste pickers. It highlights the importance of waste picker alliances to strengthen their bargaining power and access social protection.

Moreover, the report explores alternative job opportunities for waste pickers, such as waste sorters recycling and upcycling plant workers, craftsmen/women, and environmental educators. These opportunities can offer stable and regulated employment, empowering waste pickers to transition into more sustainable and dignified livelihoods.

In conclusion, the mapping exercise of waste pickers in Fiji has provided valuable insights into the lives and challenges faced by these essential contributors to the waste management system. By acknowledging their role and addressing the barriers they encounter, Fiji can work towards creating an inclusive and empathetic society that values waste pickers' contributions and supports their well-being and livelihoods. The report's recommendations offer a pathway towards a more sustainable and equitable waste management system, benefiting waste pickers and the entire community.

Key Findings

General

- The waste picker community in Fiji comprises a diverse group of individuals, with males constituting 54% of the surveyed waste pickers and females accounting for 44%. Additionally, 2% of the waste pickers identified as belonging to the LGBTQI+ community, highlighting the need for inclusive support and opportunities for this vulnerable group.¹
- Many waste pickers, 67%, identified as Itaukei, while 29% were Indo-Fijians. This ethnic diversity emphasizes the importance of understanding and respecting cultural nuances to develop sustainable waste management solutions that benefit all waste pickers across the nation.
- The survey revealed that social isolation is experienced by a considerable number of waste pickers, with 27% reporting sometimes feeling socially isolated, and 11% experiencing frequent social isolation. Addressing this issue is crucial for enhancing the mental well-being and work experience of waste pickers.
- Occupational safety and health emerged as important concerns, with 19% of waste pickers reporting experiencing injuries sometimes and 6% mentioning rare occurrences of accidents. This highlights the need for implementing proper safety protocols and providing access to healthcare resources to protect waste pickers from potential hazards.²
- The waste picker community displayed a diverse range of educational levels, with 59% holding a secondary level of education and 30% having completed primary education. Encouragingly, 6% of waste pickers had received tertiary education, indicating the potential for capacity-building and skill development programs to empower waste pickers to pursue alternative livelihoods.
- 29% of the waste pickers were identified as formal waste collectors, working within registered companies or councils. The majority, 71%, were informal waste collectors who often operate independently or in small groups. Bridging the gap between formal and informal waste collectors can lead to better integration and improved working conditions for all waste pickers.

¹ The representation of the LGBTQI+ community, though seemingly low, could be attributed to underreporting. Not all individuals might have felt comfortable openly discussing their gender identity, making it difficult to recognize the presence of larger LGBTQI+ members within the community.

² The statistics reveal that 19% of waste pickers experienced injuries at times, while 6% mentioned occasional accidents. Many waste pickers may become so accustomed to their work environment that they might not perceive injuries or accidents. Moreover, some may have hesitated to report injuries, fearing that they would get targeted by the higher authorities.

Driving Forces

- **Orphaned at a young age:** Some waste pickers turned to this occupation as their parents had passed away from natural calamities or health issues, leaving them in poverty and seeking daily livelihood opportunities.
- **Career inheritance:** For a significant number of waste pickers, waste picking becomes a familial occupation, with individuals exposed to collecting and sorting waste from an early age, leading them to continue in this sector.
- **Flexibility and adaptability:** Waste picking offers freedom, flexibility, and higher earnings compared to other available jobs, making it an attractive option for individuals seeking more income.
- **Poverty and lack of educational opportunities:** Limited access to education due to poverty hinders waste pickers' chances of securing jobs in other sectors, leaving waste picking as one of their primary livelihood options.
- **Influence of friends and relatives:** Many waste pickers enter this sector due to the influence of friends and family members already involved in waste picking, leading them to follow suit and participate in this occupation.

Acronyms

CPRs: Collection Pillars of Recycling

DOE: Department of Environment

FCS: Fiji Cancer Society

FMF: Flour Mills of Fiji

FNU: Fiji National University

FWCC: Fiji Women's Crisis Centre

IUCN: International Union for Conservation of Nature

LGBTQI+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex

MOE: Ministry of Education

MOH: Ministry of Health

MOW: Ministry for Women and Poverty Alleviation

PET: Polyethylene terephthalate

PRF: Pacific Recycling Foundation

USP: University of the South Pacific

WRFL: Waste Recyclers (Fiji) Ltd

WIEGO: Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The mapping exercise of waste pickers in Fiji, initiated by the Pacific Recycling Foundation in collaboration with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), was a transformative project aimed at shedding light on the lives and dynamics of waste pickers in the country. The primary objective was to gain comprehensive insights into the waste picking community, their work patterns, challenges, and contributions to sustainable waste management.

Informal waste pickers play a crucial yet often overlooked role in Fiji's waste management ecosystem. They are the unsung heroes who actively contribute to recycling and waste diversion, minimizing the environmental impact of solid waste. However, these waste pickers also confront various socio-economic vulnerabilities, marginalization, and lack of recognition for their indispensable efforts.

The project sought to address this knowledge gap and advocate for the inclusion and empowerment of waste pickers in formal waste management processes. Through a participatory approach, the project aimed to map the waste pickers' communities, document their experiences, and better understand the complexities of their operations.

The mapping team conducted field visits, engaging directly with waste pickers to build trust and rapport. Surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions were organized to gather data on their livelihoods, income patterns, working conditions, and access to essential services. The mapping exercise extended beyond the waste pickers themselves, involving their families and communities to capture a holistic view of their lives.

1.2 Importance of Organizing

Organizing waste pickers is a pivotal step in fostering a sustainable waste management ecosystem. As waste picking activities play a vital role in recycling and reducing waste sent to landfill, empowering CPRs through organized efforts brings forth numerous benefits for individuals, communities, and the environment.

1.1.1 Environmental Impact

Organized waste pickers significantly contribute to environmental conservation by diverting recyclable materials from landfills. Their systematic collection and sorting processes ensure that valuable resources like plastic, paper, and metal are channeled back into the production cycle. As a result, the burden on natural resources is reduced, carbon emissions are mitigated, and overall ecological preservation is enhanced.

1.1.2 Circular Economy Promotion

By organizing waste pickers into cohesive units, opportunities for establishing a circular economy are unlocked. Waste pickers can collaborate with recycling industries to supply raw materials, fostering a closed-loop system that minimizes waste and promotes sustainable production practices. This symbiotic relationship between waste pickers and recycling businesses strengthens the foundation of a circular economy.

1.1.3 Socioeconomic Empowerment

Organizing waste pickers leads to improved working conditions and livelihoods. Collective efforts enable them to negotiate better prices for recyclables, reducing exploitative practices and increasing their income. With access to fair wages, social security, and benefits, waste pickers gain financial stability and empowerment, elevating their quality of life and that of their families.

1.1.4 Community Development

Waste picker organizations contribute to community development by reinvesting in social initiatives. Surplus funds generated from organized waste collection can be utilized to develop local infrastructure, provide educational opportunities, and address pressing community needs. As agents of positive change, waste pickers actively participate in improving their neighborhoods.

1.1.5 Advocacy and Representation

Organized waste pickers have a stronger voice in advocating for their rights and interests. By uniting under a collective identity, they can engage with policymakers, local authorities, and relevant stakeholders to influence waste management policies and foster an inclusive waste management framework. Such representation ensures that waste pickers' concerns are considered during decision-making processes.

1.1.6 Safety and Social Well-being

Organized waste pickers can establish safety protocols, ensuring that their members receive proper training on handling hazardous materials and protective equipment. This minimizes occupational hazards and fosters a culture of well-being within their community. Additionally, collective support systems offer emotional assistance, reducing the social isolation and stigma waste pickers often experience.

1.1.7 Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building

Through organized structures, waste pickers can exchange knowledge, skills, and best practices. Capacity building initiatives can be implemented to enhance their expertise in waste sorting, recycling techniques, financial management, and business development. This knowledge sharing strengthens their professional competencies and facilitates their integration into broader waste management frameworks.

1.3 Study Objectives

The project's key objectives include:

- **Comprehensive Mapping:** To create a comprehensive database of waste pickers across Fiji, documenting their locations, demographics, and waste collection routes. This mapping exercise aimed to provide a clear understanding of the spatial distribution and scale of waste picking activities in different regions.

- **Identification of Challenges:** To identify and analyze the challenges faced by waste pickers, including social stigmatization, safety concerns, lack of access to basic necessities, and barriers to education and healthcare.
- **Recognition of Contributions:** To recognize and highlight the invaluable contributions of waste pickers to Fiji's waste management and environmental conservation. The project aimed to raise awareness about the significance of their work and advocate for their inclusion in formal waste management strategies.
- **Empowerment and Advocacy:** To empower waste pickers by providing them with a platform to voice their concerns and advocate for their rights. The project sought to strengthen the waste pickers community and facilitate their engagement with policymakers and relevant stakeholders.
- **Policy Recommendations:** To generate evidence-based policy recommendations that address the specific needs of waste pickers and promote their integration into formal waste management systems. The aim was to influence policy decisions that foster a more inclusive and sustainable waste management framework.

1.4 Who are the Collection Pillars of Recycling (CPRs)

The Collection Pillars of Recycling (CPRs) are a group of individuals who were formerly referred to as "Informal Waste pickers" but have now been given a new name to combat the stigma associated with their work. The term "Collection Pillars of Recycling" aims to recognize and elevate their essential role in waste management. Through the name change, PRF also seeks to redefine and elevate the status of these individuals, recognizing their vital role in waste management and the negative stereotypes associated with waste picking and promote dignity, respect, and inclusivity for the CPRs.

The CPRs represent a diverse group of individuals who are instrumental in driving positive change in waste management practices, promoting recycling awareness, and building more sustainable communities. Their dedication, expertise, and resilience make them integral pillars in the transition towards a circular economy and a cleaner, greener future.

The CPRs are predominantly composed of women and members of the LGBTQI+ community who are engaged in waste picking activities in Fiji and the surrounding region. They play a crucial role in the recycling value chain by collecting, sorting, and salvaging recyclable materials from various sources, including households, commercial establishments, and public spaces.

These individuals often operate in challenging and marginalized conditions, facing societal discrimination, limited access to resources, and occupational hazards. Despite their significant contributions to waste management and environmental sustainability, they have traditionally been undervalued and excluded from formal recognition and support systems.

The CPRs are not only valuable contributors to recycling efforts but also champions of environmental sustainability. Their work helps divert recyclable materials from landfills, reducing pollution and conserving natural resources. Moreover, by engaging and empowering women and LGBTQI+ individuals in waste management, the CPRs contribute to promoting gender equity and inclusivity in traditionally male-dominated industries.



A CPR washing PET bottles before putting it in a bulk bag.
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

1.5 A brief History of CPRs

The history of CPRs is closely intertwined with the establishment of PRF in 2022. Informal waste picking has long been a part of waste management in Fiji. However, their journey has its roots dating back even further, as some of the waste picking communities have been engaged with the commercial arm of PRF, Waste Recyclers (Fiji) Ltd for the last 29 years. Prior to the establishment of PRF, WRFL was already providing support on a needs basis to certain CPRs. Over the years, these CPRs, particularly women and members of the LGBTQI+ community, have faced social stigma and discrimination due to the nature of their work. They were often subjected to negative stereotypes, marginalization, and exclusion from formal recognition and support systems. This societal perception further perpetuated their vulnerability and limited their access to resources and opportunities.

PRF emerged as an autonomous organization focused on empowering vulnerable communities involved in waste picking, with a particular focus on women and LGBTQI+ individuals. PRF recognized the need to challenge the negative stereotypes and improve the lives of CPRs through inclusive and rights-based approaches.

PRF joined forces with various partners, including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, and local municipal councils, to address the challenges faced by CPRs. Collaborative efforts were initiated to provide training and support programs that encompassed gender, human rights, legal literacy, financial literacy, and healthcare accessibility. These initiatives aimed to empower CPRs, enhance their well-being, and advocate for their rights.

A significant milestone in the history of CPRs was the implementation of a workshop by PRF in collaboration with its partners. This workshop focused on gender, human rights, and the recognition of CPRs as vital contributors to waste management and recycling. It also highlighted the need to challenge the stigma associated with waste picking and led to the adoption of the new term "Collection Pillars of Recycling" to redefine and elevate their status.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought additional challenges for CPRs, including reduced access to waste sources, increased health risks, and limited livelihood opportunities. PRF, along with local civil society organizations, stepped forward to provide essential support to CPRs in the form of food packs, dignity packs for women, and personal protection equipment (PPE). This assistance aimed to mitigate the immediate impacts of the pandemic and ensure the continuity of waste management services.

Through ongoing collaboration with stakeholders, PRF continues to advocate for the recognition, empowerment, and social inclusion of CPRs. Efforts are focused on improving working conditions, providing access to resources such as retirement funds and bank accounts, and creating opportunities for economic empowerment through upcycling projects and green job initiatives.

The history of CPRs reflects a gradual shift in understanding and acknowledging the important role CPRs play in waste management and recycling. From facing stigma and discrimination to being recognized as essential pillars in the circular economy, the journey of CPRs and the PRF represents a growing commitment to inclusivity, gender equity, and sustainable waste management practices.



CPRs Empowerment Session with representatives from FWCC, IUCN, DOE, and PRF. (Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

1.6 Informal Waste Collection in Fiji

The island nation of Fiji, known for its stunning natural beauty and vibrant culture, also faces the challenges of waste management. As waste accumulates in drains and abandoned vehicles, concerns about public health, environmental degradation, and urban cleanliness arise. Amidst these challenges, a unique and essential component of Fiji's waste management landscape emerges the informal waste collection system.

CPRs, commonly referred to as scavengers or recyclers, play a crucial role in this informal ecosystem. Operating alongside formal waste management structures, CPRs contribute significantly to environmental sustainability and community well-being. Reports from local media outlets, such as The Fiji Times, highlight the pressing challenges faced by Fiji's waste management system, emphasizing the importance of informal waste collection.

In contrast to the bureaucratic and structured nature of formal waste management, informal waste collection offers agility and responsiveness to the dynamic waste disposal landscape. CPRs venture into streets, public spaces, and residential areas, diligently collecting recyclable materials that might otherwise end up in landfills. By doing so, they divert valuable resources from disposal sites, reducing the burden on formal waste infrastructure.

The environmental impact of their efforts is profound. By reducing the amount of waste destined for dumpsites and landfill, CPRs contribute to pollution reduction, resource conservation, and the promotion of a circular economy. Their tireless work fosters a sense of environmental responsibility, essential for mitigating the negative effects of waste accumulation.

Beyond environmental benefits, informal waste collection is also a lifeline for many individuals belonging to vulnerable communities. Serving as micro-entrepreneurs, CPRs turn the collected recyclables into income, supporting their families and driving community development. This socioeconomic empowerment has the potential to lift families out of poverty and create a ripple effect of positive change in their communities.

However, CPRs face their share of challenges. Often marginalized and stigmatized, they endure negative societal perceptions that undermine their dignity and social integration. Addressing their vulnerabilities and providing access to essential services, such as healthcare and education, is crucial for improving their overall well-being.

Integrating the informal waste collection system with formal waste management offers a promising way forward. Collaboration between formal waste authorities, civil society organizations, and CPRs can lead to more sustainable and inclusive solutions. Empowering CPRs through capacity building initiatives, such as financial literacy, occupational health and safety training, and entrepreneurship skills, can enhance their prospects and resilience.

Policy reforms that recognize and protect the rights of CPRs are vital in shaping a supportive environment for their work. Public awareness campaigns that highlight their contributions and foster positive narratives can help build appreciation for their crucial role in waste management.

1.7 Types of Waste Collectors in Fiji

In Fiji, the waste management system relies on a diverse group of waste collectors, each playing a crucial role in recycling and waste disposal. These waste collectors can be categorized into various types based on their specific roles and interactions within the waste management ecosystem. Understanding the roles and contributions of these waste collectors is essential to developing effective strategies for waste management and improving the livelihoods of those involved.

Glass bottle collectors	These collectors are actively engaged in the collection of glass bottles, which are then sold to beverage companies through buy-back schemes. By participating in recycling initiatives, they contribute to reducing the environmental impact of glass waste and promoting a more sustainable approach to waste management.
PET bottle collectors	Focused on collecting PET bottles, these individuals play a vital role in Fiji's recycling efforts. They gather PET bottles from various sources, such as streets, supermarkets, and other public places, and sell them back to bottling companies or juice sellers. This process facilitates the recycling of PET bottles and encourages a circular economy for plastic waste.
Scrap metal collectors	Working with a primary focus on scrap metal, these collectors gather various metal materials from different sources, including discarded appliances, machinery, and construction materials. Their efforts support the recycling industry and prevent valuable metals from ending up in dumpsites and landfill.
Dumpsite waste collectors	These waste collectors operate around dumpsites, salvaging recyclable materials and valuable items from discarded waste. While their work is essential for recycling efforts, dumpsite waste collectors often face challenging and hazardous working conditions.
Scrap metal agents	Acting as intermediaries between scrap metal collectors and scrap metal yards, these agents buy scrap metal from collectors and then sell it to recycling facilities. They play a pivotal role in ensuring a steady supply of scrap metal to recycling industries.
Yard workers	At scrap collection yards, workers are responsible for sorting and organizing the collected materials. They segregate various recyclables and prepare them for further processing, making their role critical in the recycling chain.
Garbage collectors	These are official workers employed by municipal bodies to collect and dispose of household waste. They operate garbage trucks and follow designated collection schedules to maintain cleanliness in urban and suburban areas.
Disabled waste collectors	Living mostly on the streets, these waste collectors face additional challenges in interacting and integrating with society. Their efforts to collect recyclable materials contribute to waste management but often go unnoticed due to their marginalized status.

1.8 Driving Forces to Waste Picking

In Fiji, the waste picking sector serves as an open market with easily accessible entry points and flexible work schedules. It is characterized by daily or seasonal work, but it often lacks the respect and recognition given to other professions. Despite these challenges, many individuals have found themselves working in this sector due to a combination of factors that drive their motivation.

The general motivations or driving forces behind respondents joining the waste picking sector are described below:

1.8.1 Orphaned at a young age, leading to poverty and the need to find a means of daily livelihood

In some cases, CPRs in Fiji may have experienced the loss of their parents at a young age, either due to natural calamities or health issues. The absence of parental support can result in financial hardships, making it essential for these individuals to find a way to support themselves and their families. With limited resources and educational opportunities, waste picking might become a viable option for them to earn a daily income and meet their basic needs. Despite facing such adversity, some CPRs may remain resilient and dedicated to waste picking for many years.

1.8.2 Career inheritance, where waste picking becomes a familial occupation

In certain communities or families, waste picking becomes a generational occupation, passed down from parents to their children. From a young age, children may be exposed to waste collection and sorting practices as they assist their parents during sick days or leisure periods. This exposure can instill familiarity and comfort with waste picking activities, shaping their perception of waste picking as a feasible career path. As they grow older, they might choose to continue the family tradition and work in the waste picking sector. This phenomenon is especially prevalent among certain indigenous and minority groups in Fiji.

1.8.3 Flexibility and adaptability of waste picking compared to other available jobs

Waste picking offers a level of freedom and flexibility that might not be present in other formal or structured job opportunities. CPRs have the autonomy to decide when and where to work, which can be appealing to individuals seeking a non-conventional work environment. Moreover, waste picking can be more lucrative than some other jobs, such as housekeeping, laboring, or painting, especially for those with limited education or skills. The potential for higher earnings, combined with the adaptable nature of waste picking, draws individuals to this sector.

1.8.4 Poverty and lack of educational opportunities limiting alternative employment options

Many CPRs in Fiji face poverty and come from backgrounds with limited access to educational opportunities. As a result, they may encounter barriers when seeking formal employment in other sectors that often require specific qualifications or skills. Without viable alternatives, waste picking becomes a practical and accessible option for them to earn a living. The low barriers to entry and the immediate earning potential of waste picking can be attractive to individuals who lack the educational qualifications for other jobs.

1.8.5 Influence of friends and relatives already involved in waste picking

Within certain communities or neighborhoods, waste picking might be a prevalent occupation. When individuals see their friends or relatives engaged in waste picking and earning a livelihood, it can influence their decision to join the sector as well. The close-knit relationships and trust among CPRs in the community create a supportive network that encourages others to consider waste picking as a viable option. The sense of camaraderie and shared experiences further solidifies their commitment to waste picking as a means of survival and economic empowerment.

1.8.6 Lack of Formal Employment Opportunities

Many CPRs may turn to this informal sector due to limited formal employment opportunities. With few job options available, waste picking becomes a viable means of earning income for individuals with minimal education or skills.

1.8.7 Unforeseen Events

Within the waste picking community lies a thread woven by unforeseen events that have propelled individuals into this challenging livelihood. Tragic circumstances and unexpected life turns have compelled people to resort to waste picking as a means of survival when all other options have faded away.

In some cases, individuals find themselves plunged into waste picking due to sudden financial crises resulting from unexpected job losses, being exiled from home, or facing disastrous events like house fires or the death of the sole breadwinner in the family. The abrupt closure of local industries or the collapse of small businesses leaves them without any means to support themselves and their families.

The onset of unexpected health deterioration and serious injuries also thrusts individuals into the realm of waste picking. The exorbitant costs of healthcare and medical treatments can lead families into debt, eroding their financial stability. To cope with mounting medical bills and ongoing expenses, some individuals are forced to resort to waste picking to secure themselves financially.

Intriguingly, even political events can steer individuals towards waste picking. A compelling example is the story of our current Prime Minister, who himself had to turn to waste picking due to political turmoil that significantly altered the trajectory of his life. This remarkable journey highlights the dynamic nature of unforeseen events and how they can shape destinies.

1.8.7 Lack of Social Safety Nets

In Fiji, where social welfare support may be insufficient or unavailable to certain marginalized groups, waste picking may serve as a lifeline for survival. It becomes a means to secure some income and basic necessities when other social safety nets are lacking.

1.8.8 Migration and Urbanization

The growth of urban areas and migration to cities often lead to increased waste generation. This urban environment creates opportunities for CPRs to collect recyclable materials from households, commercial establishments, and public spaces.

1.8.9 Environmental Concerns

In some cases, CPRs may be driven by a strong sense of environmental responsibility. They recognize the importance of recycling and diverting waste from dumpsites and landfill, contributing to environmental conservation efforts.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Preliminary Study

A preliminary study was conducted to gather information and insights for the report. A literature review was undertaken, related to CPRs and waste management. However, it was found that there were no existing documents specifically addressing CPRs in Fiji. This notable gap in the literature highlights the importance of documenting the situation of CPRs. To inform the literature review, an analysis of existing mapping exercise reports from other countries such as Nepal, Kenya, and Vietnam were conducted, providing valuable insights and lessons that can be applied to the context of CPRs in Fiji.

2.2 Approach

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the present context, a qualitative approach to the study was adopted for the mapping exercise. This involved face-to-face interactions with the CPRs and relevant organizations.

A draft questionnaire was developed, covering various sections such as Personal details, Social life, Health and Safety, Access to Basic Necessities and Essential Services, Children's Rights to Education, Human Rights, LGBTQI+ Community, and Recyclable Collection.

The questionnaire underwent internal discussions within the mapping team, and necessary amendments were made. To ensure the questionnaire's effectiveness and comprehensiveness, it was shared with key organizations such as the Fiji Cancer Society, Fiji Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Women and Poverty Alleviation, Ministry of Health, and Diabetes Fiji for their input and validation.

Separate proposals were submitted to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) to provide counseling sessions to the mapping team and to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics for technical support in data collection and validation. Discussions were also held with the Fiji Bureau of Statistics to explore possibilities of receiving technical support, including the provision of tablets and training, at their head office.

In addition, a press conference was conducted at the Pacific Recycling Foundation (PRF) office to raise awareness about the mapping exercise. In preparation for the study, the Coordinator of Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Ms. Shamima Ali, provided mentoring and guidance to the PRF team for the journey ahead. The FWCC

also extended their assistance by offering counseling services and referrals to the CPRs and the mapping team.



Ms. Shamima Ali providing mentoring and guidance to the mapping team at the PRF head office before the mapping exercise commenced.

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

2.3 Survey Method

2.3.1 Preparations

To ensure smooth operations, each interviewer had a folder containing all the necessary forms and documents required for the interviews. The team was divided into groups, with each group assigned a vehicle for transportation provided by Avis Rentals. The weather forecast was checked to prepare for rainy or sunny conditions. Additionally, it was ensured that everyone had fully charged mobile phones and laptops. All equipment and materials were loaded into the vehicles for easy access during the interviews.

Upon reaching a location, considerations were made based on the weather conditions. In case of rain or excessive sun, a tent was set up to provide shelter for the interviews. If the weather was normal, a convenient and comfortable location was chosen for conducting the interviews.

Two approaches were used to conduct the surveys: group surveys and individual surveys. Group surveys were considered more efficient when two interviewers could interview a CPR together, after seeking consent from the CPR. In cases where there were a large number of CPRs, individual interviews were conducted. For geographically scattered households, house-to-house visits were carried out where a pair of interviewers visited the CPRs. Interviewers introduced themselves, explained the purpose of the mapping exercise, and conducted the interview. In the case of dumpsite visits, a tent was set up where participants availed themselves individually for the interview and then resumed their work.

2.3.2 Interview Process

Prior to conducting the interviews, the consent form was read to each CPR in their preferred language, ensuring they understood its purpose. Participants willingly indicated their participation by either signing the consent form or providing their thumbprints, indicating their voluntary agreement to participate. It was crucial to keep the consent forms safely stored in a designated folder. Additionally, a daily data form was filled out, recording the names and contact information of the participants. The completed form was signed off by the supervisor for verification.

During the interviews, interviewers offered refreshments provided by FMF and Coca-Cola to the participants as a gesture of hospitality. Following the prepared interview questions, CPRs were encouraged to share their experiences, challenges, and needs openly and honestly. Active listening and providing necessary clarifications or guidance during the interview process were key aspects of conducting the interviews.

After the Interview was finished, gratitude was expressed to the CPRs for their participation and valuable insights. Following the interviews, the consent forms, daily data forms, and data collected on Excel spreadsheets were cross-checked to ensure accuracy and completeness.

During the interview process, if an interviewer encountered a CPR in need, FWCC helpline cards were handed out to the CPRs. Additionally, in most cases, their phone numbers were collected and shared with the designated FWCC counselor. CPRs were also advised to expect a call from the counselor to provide further assistance and support.



The mapping team conducting interviews with the CPRs at various locations
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

2.3.3 Capturing Stories

In addition to collecting data through this survey, another important aspect of the mapping exercise was to capture the stories and experiences of CPRs. These stories provided a deeper understanding of their lives, challenges, and aspirations.

Based on the evaluation by the interviewers during the mapping process, certain individuals were approached to participate in video interviews. These interviews aimed to give a voice to the CPRs.

Prior to conducting the video interviews, consent was obtained from the participants, ensuring that they were comfortable sharing their stories on camera. Respecting the participants' privacy and confidentiality, the videographer took measures to blur the faces of the interviewers during the video recording.

The responsibility of capturing these documentary-style videos was entrusted to Vivid Media's Director, Mr. Ravinesh Roshan, a close working partner of PRF and has been sensitized on PRF work ethics. Various techniques and equipment, like drones were used to document the experience and journey of the mapping exercise.

The inclusion of storytelling in the mapping exercise not only amplified the voices of CPRs but also created an opportunity for greater empathy, awareness, and advocacy. These stories serve as powerful tools for raising awareness about the daily struggles and resilience of CPRs and can contribute to shaping policies and interventions that address their needs and improve their working conditions.

2.4 Methods of Data Collection

To gather comprehensive data for the mapping exercise, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. A consent form was designed and printed, outlining the purpose of the mapping exercise and the confidentiality of the collected information. CPRs were asked to sign or provide a thumbprint on the consent form to indicate their voluntary participation. The questionnaire was used as a structured guide during the interviews, covering various aspects such as socio-economic conditions, living conditions, access to basic services, and work-related challenges.

Interviews were conducted in pairs, with one interviewer following the questionnaire while the other filled the corresponding Excel sheet. This approach allowed for efficient data collection and ensured comprehensive coverage of CPRs' responses.

The daily data form served as a cross-reference tool to ensure all interviews were accounted for and to facilitate data validation. After the interviews, the collected data from the questionnaires and excel sheets was transferred to the digital platform on the PRF website. This digital storage facilitated data analysis and the generation of graphs and visualizations for the collected data. Throughout the data collection process, the consent of the CPRs was prioritized, and their confidentiality was maintained.

2.5 Data Analysis

Prior to analysis, the collected data was carefully reviewed to identify and correct any errors or inconsistencies. This included checking for missing data, outliers, and data entry mistakes. Cleaning the data ensured the accuracy and reliability of the analysis.

Descriptive statistics was calculated to provide an overview of the key characteristics and trends observed among the CPRs. This involved analyzing variables such as age, gender, educational background, income levels, and working conditions. Measures such as frequencies, percentages, and means were used to summarize the data. Data visualization techniques, including charts and graphs, were employed to present the findings in a visually appealing and easily understandable manner. Visual representations were used to enhance key insights and facilitated stakeholder engagement.

Cross-tabulation was conducted to examine the relationships between different variables. This involved analyzing how variables such as age, gender, and working conditions intersected with factors such as access to basic services, health and safety issues, and social well-being.

In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative data from open-ended questions and narratives were used to gain a deeper understanding of CPRs' experiences, challenges, and needs. The findings from the mapping exercise were compared with existing reports and studies from other countries, such as Nepal, Kenya, and Vietnam, to gain comparative insights and identify similarities or differences in CPRs' conditions and support systems.

The analyzed data were interpreted considering the research objectives and the broader context of waste management in Fiji. Conclusions were drawn based on the findings, highlighting key issues, challenges, and recommendations for policymakers, stakeholders, and organizations involved in waste management and supporting the CPRs.

2.6 Location Selection

The mapping exercise covered various locations across Fiji. The selection of survey locations for the mapping exercise was based on various factors such as waste generation, population density, and geographical coverage. The following tables display various locations throughout Fiji covered during the mapping exercise:

Areas covered in Viti Levu

Rakiraki/ Tavua	Ba	Lautoka	Nadi	Sigatoka	Suva/Lami	Nausori/ Nasinu/ Korovou
Dumpsite	Dumpsite	Dumpsite	Nadi Market	Dumpsite	Vatuwaqa	Bau
Naria	Ba Market	Vunato Settlement	Nadi Bus stand	Kulukulu Settlement	Toorak	Verata
Korowaqa	Moururu Village	Vidogo Settlement	Wailoaloa Beach		Nadiu Settlement	Davuilevu
Navutulevu	Navoli Village				Nanuku Settlement	Naduru
Rakiraki market	Tauveqavega	Tomuka Settlement	Namaka		Suva City	Kasavu
Reservoir Settlement		Saweni	Nawaka		Suva Market	Nausori Market
Tavua Town Council		Saru	Matintar		Lami	Nadari
		Cuvu California	Votualevu		WRFL yard	Waituri
		WRFL Yard				Toqa
		Lautoka Market				Nakasi
						Tailevu

Areas covered in Vanua Levu

Labasa	Savusavu
Namara	Nakama
Dumpsite	Naqere
Labasa Town	Vunikoko
Labasa Market	Vunivere
	Nabaka
	Navatu
	Savusavu Market
	Savusavu dumpsite

These locations were strategically chosen to ensure representation from major areas and to cover a wide range of waste picking activities across Fiji.

The location selection process was identified by a preliminary visit conducted by the mapping team. The visit identified areas with diverse waste streams and concentrations of CPRs. For example, in Lautoka, Vunato was selected based on factors such as population density, waste generation, and proximity to the dumpsite. The initial study areas did not include Labasa and Savusavu however, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of rural and suburban waste management, these two areas had to be included.

2.7 Assumptions and Limitations

During the mapping exercise, several assumptions were made, and limitations were encountered. These factors should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings of the study.

Firstly, it was assumed that the CPRs participating in the survey provided accurate and truthful information. While efforts were made to ensure the reliability of the data collected, there is a possibility of response bias or misreporting by participants.

Additionally, the data collected from the mapping exercise represents a snapshot of the waste picking sector at the time of the study. It may not fully capture long-term trends or changes that could occur in the future. The selected locations for data collection were assumed to be representative of waste picking activities in Fiji. However, it is important to acknowledge that the sample may not fully encompass all CPRs across the entire country.

Furthermore, there were certain limitations to the study. Limited resources and time constraints may have impacted the scope and depth of the mapping exercise. The study was conducted over a specific period, and not all waste picking areas or communities may have been included. Language barriers could also have posed challenges during the interviews, as most CPRs have preferred to communicate in local dialects rather than English.

Moreover, the mapping exercise focused primarily on the CPRs and may not have captured data on formal waste management systems or other aspects of waste management in Fiji. The sample size and selection method used for the survey may introduce potential biases, as convenience sampling was employed due to the reluctance of some CPRs to participate in the study.

Additionally, the data collected through self-reported interviews may be subject to recall or social desirability biasness, where respondents may provide answers, they perceive as socially acceptable rather than their true experiences. External factors such as weather conditions, cultural norms, and access limitations to certain areas may have also influenced the data collection process and outcomes.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

The following literature review provides insights into the waste picking sector in Nepal and two additional studies conducted in Vietnam (Da Nang), and Kenya. The review highlights the challenges faced by CPRs, their crucial contributions to waste management, and the urgent need to recognize and support their work.

3.1 The Importance of CPRs

The report from Nepal highlights the motivations behind CPRs entering the sector. It also reveals that male CPRs in Nepal expressed higher job satisfaction due to autonomy and higher earnings, while women reported lower satisfaction due to lower wages. The study emphasizes the significance of CPRs' roles in the recycling industry and their active participation in waste collection, sorting, and selling recyclable materials.

In the study conducted in Da Nang, Vietnam, it is noted that CPRs play a vital role in reducing the amount of waste that ends up in landfills. Their contributions to resource recovery and recycling efforts were found to be essential for sustainable waste management practices. The study underlines the need for recognizing the value of CPRs and integrating them into formal waste management systems.

The research conducted in Kenya highlights the resourcefulness of CPRs, particularly in recovering valuable materials such as plastic and metal from the waste stream. CPRs in Kenya were found to contribute to resource conservation and environmental sustainability by redirecting these materials for recycling and reuse. The study emphasizes the need for supporting CPRs' efforts through policies that protect their rights, provide fair wages, and ensure access to social protections.

3.2 Challenges Faced by CPRs

In Nepal, it is highlighted that women in Nepal often engage in waste picking due to poverty, the absence of other opportunities, and the necessity to earn additional income for their families. They face economic hardships and are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination. However, the study also mentions that awareness campaigns and increased literacy have contributed to a reduction in discrimination against CPRs in the Kathmandu Valley.

Similarly, in the study conducted in Da Nang, Vietnam, CPRs face similar challenges. Poverty and limited employment prospects drive individuals, predominantly from marginalized backgrounds, to work in the informal waste sector. CPRs in Da Nang often lack social protection, exposing them to precarious working conditions and uncertain income. Their marginalized status makes them vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination.

In the research conducted in Kenya, CPRs also confront similar challenges. Poverty and limited economic opportunities push individuals to engage in waste picking as a means of survival. They work in hazardous conditions, often without proper protective gear, putting their health at risk. Furthermore, CPRs in Kenya lack access to social protection measures such as healthcare and retirement benefits, leaving them exposed to various vulnerabilities.

Overall, CPRs in Nepal, Da Nang, and Kenya share common challenges stemming from poverty, limited social protection, and a lack of formal employment opportunities. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive measures that recognize the value of CPRs, protect their rights, provide fair wages, and offer social protections to enhance their livelihoods and well-being.

3.3 Stories from the Reports

In the report from Nepal, a female CPR from Bharatpur shared her harrowing experience of vulnerability and exploitation. She recounted an incident where her 13-year-old daughter, who went to the landfill in her place, was raped by a truck driver. With the support of fellow CPRs and the organization, the perpetrator was apprehended, but due to embarrassment, the CPR felt compelled to marry her daughter off. This case highlights the vulnerabilities faced by CPRs, particularly women and their children, in terms of safety and protection.

The report from Da Nang, a CPR, sheds light on the challenges faced by individuals in the sector. Being a single mother, she works long hours collecting recyclables from households and earns a meager income. She faces discrimination and is subjected to stigma due to her occupation, making it difficult for her to improve her socioeconomic conditions. Her case demonstrates the lack of social recognition and limited economic opportunities for CPRs in Da Nang.

In the research conducted in Kenya, a CPR from Nairobi highlights the challenges faced by CPRs in terms of occupational health and safety. He works in a hazardous environment, sifting through waste without proper protective gear. He often encounters sharp objects, toxic substances, and biological waste, putting his health at risk. This case underscores the need for improved working conditions and access to protective equipment for CPRs in Kenya.

These case studies illustrate the real-life experiences of CPRs and provide valuable insights into the challenges they face on a daily basis. The cases highlight issues such as exploitation, discrimination, precarious income, and occupational hazards. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies to support CPRs and improve their living conditions.

3.4 Contribution to Waste Management

CPRs make a significant contribution to waste management despite operating in informal and marginalized settings. The studies conducted in Nepal, Da Nang (Vietnam), and Kenya highlight the crucial role that CPRs play in promoting recycling, reducing landfill waste, and conserving valuable resources.

CPRs in Nepal are actively involved in the collection, sorting, and sale of recyclable materials. They form an integral part of the recycling industry, helping divert waste away from landfills and enabling the recovery of valuable resources. By collecting recyclables such as plastics, metals, and paper, CPRs contribute to reducing the environmental impact of waste and promoting sustainable waste management practices.

The study conducted in Da Nang emphasizes the importance of CPRs in reducing the volume of waste that reaches landfills. CPRs in this region are instrumental in sorting and recovering recyclable materials from the waste stream. By salvaging items such as plastics, paper, glass, and metals, CPRs contribute to waste reduction and recycling efforts, thus mitigating the environmental burden of waste disposal.

CPRs in Kenya play a crucial role in resource recovery from the waste stream. They collect and extract valuable materials, such as plastics and metals, which can be recycled or reused. By salvaging these resources, CPRs contribute to resource conservation and the circular economy. Their efforts help reduce the need for extracting virgin materials, conserve energy, and minimize environmental pollution associated with resource extraction and waste disposal.

Across these literatures, the CPRs demonstrate their invaluable contribution to waste management systems. Their activities lead to the recovery and recycling of materials that would otherwise end up in landfills, contributing to resource conservation and environmental sustainability. Recognizing the role of CPRs and integrating them into formal waste management processes can enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of waste management systems while promoting social inclusion and economic opportunities for these marginalized individuals.

3.5 Resource Recovery and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction and job security among CPRs are influenced by various factors, including gender dynamics, wages, and opportunities for advancement. The studies conducted in Nepal, Da Nang, and Kenya shed light on these aspects and provide insights into the experiences of CPRs in terms of job satisfaction and job security.

In Nepal, there are differences in job satisfaction among male and female CPRs. Male CPRs generally reported higher job satisfaction due to factors such as autonomy in their work, higher earnings, and the ability to independently sell recyclable materials. However, female CPRs expressed lower job satisfaction primarily because of lower wages and limited opportunities for career advancement. The gender disparity in job satisfaction can be attributed to various socio-cultural factors and the prevalence of gender-based discrimination in the waste picking sector.

The study conducted in Da Nang did not specifically focus on job satisfaction and job security. However, it emphasized the role of CPRs in reducing waste going to landfills. The fact that CPRs are actively engaged in waste collection and recycling suggests that they find value in their work and contribute to the overall waste management system. While the study did not delve into their job satisfaction, their active participation in waste management activities can be indicative of job satisfaction to some extent.

In Kenya, CPRs are involved in resource recovery and recycling activities. Although the does not provide a comprehensive analysis of job satisfaction and job security among CPRs in Kenya, it highlights their significant role in salvaging valuable materials from the waste stream. By participating in these activities, CPRs contribute to resource conservation and environmental sustainability, which can be sources of job satisfaction.

Across these studies, job security among CPRs varied depending on their affiliation with municipal bodies, private sector companies, or social enterprises. In Nepal, job permanency and benefits were limited, with most CPRs being hired on a temporary basis. Some municipalities provided job permanency to a few CPRs based on their service time, but overall, the sector lacked comprehensive job security measures. It is important to recognize that CPRs often face precarious working conditions, limited social protection, and lack of formal employment opportunities.

3.6 Organizational Aspects and Non-Profit Support

Municipal bodies in Nepal play a critical role in waste management and often hire CPRs on a temporary basis. Their engagement with CPRs varies in terms of hiring practices, contractual arrangements, and provision of job security and benefits. While some municipalities provide limited job permanency to a few CPRs based on their service time, the overall sector lacks comprehensive job security measures. Private solid waste management (SWM) companies, on the other hand, also employ CPRs but may have different approaches to contracts, wages, and benefits compared to municipal bodies. The extent to which private SWM companies provide job security and fair wages varies, and it is essential to examine their practices and their impact on CPRs' job satisfaction and job security.

Effective collaboration between stakeholders is vital in creating a supportive environment for CPRs. By coordinating their efforts, municipal bodies, private SWM companies, social enterprises, and non-profit organizations can share knowledge, resources, and expertise to improve job satisfaction and job security for CPRs. Such collaboration can enhance the impact of individual initiatives and create a more inclusive and supportive ecosystem for CPRs. Additionally, the policy and legal frameworks in Nepal, Da Nang, and Kenya play a crucial role in shaping the organizational aspects and non-profit support available to CPRs. Examining these frameworks helps understand their implications on CPRs' job satisfaction, job security, and working conditions, allowing for the identification of areas for improvement and policy interventions.

3.7 Conclusion to the Literature Review

In conclusion, this literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the waste picking sector in Nepal, Da Nang (Vietnam), and Kenya. It highlights the challenges faced by CPRs, including poverty, limited social protection, and gender disparities. Despite these challenges, CPRs play a significant role in waste management by collecting, sorting, and recycling valuable materials, thereby contributing to resource conservation and environmental sustainability.

Furthermore, the review highlights the significant contributions of non-profit organizations in supporting CPRs through capacity building, health services, advocacy, and other forms of assistance. It emphasizes the potential for collaboration between stakeholders, including government, private sector, and non-profit organizations, to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for CPRs.

Finally, this literature review underscores the importance of recognizing and supporting CPRs as essential players in the waste management sector. It calls for inclusive policies, improved infrastructure, and increased public awareness to address the challenges faced by CPRs and to fully harness their potential in promoting sustainable waste management practices. By empowering CPRs and providing them with job security, fair wages, and opportunities for advancement, it is possible to break the cycle of poverty and achieve sustainable waste management goals in Nepal and beyond.

Chapter 4: Results from the Mapping Exercise

4.1 Overview of Interviews

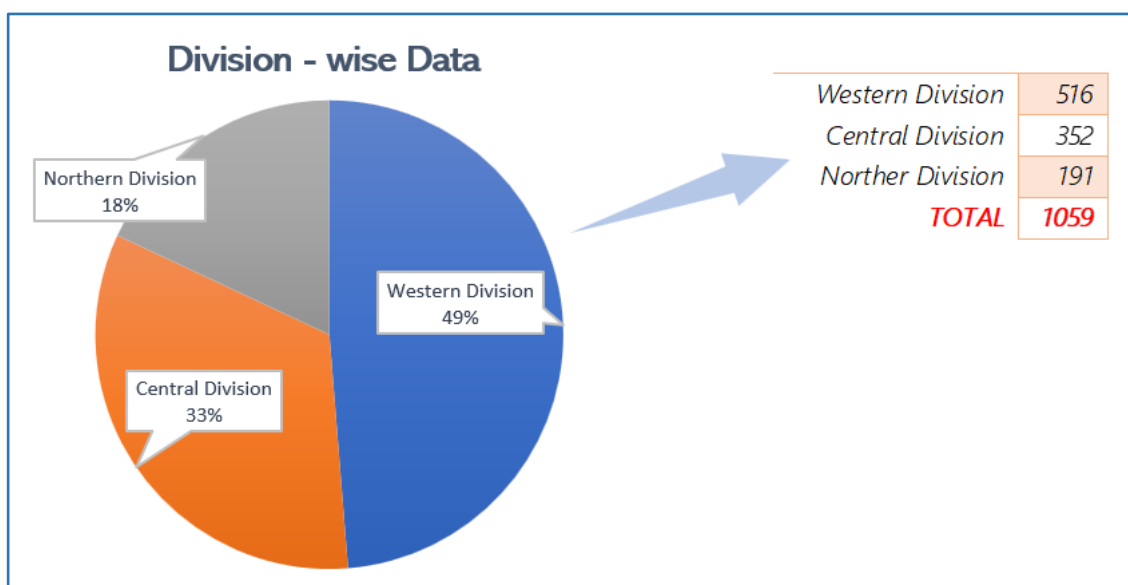
During the mapping exercise, a total of 1059 individuals, representing both formal and informal sectors, were interviewed and profiled. The surveys were carried out by two teams, with one assigned to cover Viti Levu and the other assigned to the Northern Division.

Team 1, a 7-member group, adeptly conducted interviews from June 26th to July 8th, commencing in Rakiraki and concluding in Sigatoka, which falls within Viti Levu's Western Division. Throughout this period, they diligently conducted 516 interviews with CPRs, gaining deep insights into the practices of both formal and informal waste management.

Meanwhile, Team 2, composed of 3 recycling advocates, undertook interviews from July 6th to July 10th, with their focus on Labasa and Savusavu, the densely populated of the Northern Division. With precision and attention to detail, they successfully conducted 191 interviews, uncovering valuable information on waste management in these areas.

Moreover, a selected group within Team 1, comprising 4 dedicated members, resumed the mapping exercise along the Suva-Nausori corridor from July 11th to July 14th.³ This is situated within Viti Levu's Central Division. Within a constrained span of time, the team was able to conduct 352 interviews. Their efforts provided crucial data, enhancing our understanding of waste management practices in the area.

It is notable that the Western and Northern Divisions have dumpsites, while the Central Division operates a landfill with stricter access controls. This significantly influenced the mapping process. In the Western Division, where dumpsites are more prevalent, marginalized communities find it easier to scavenge for income due to accessibility. However, the Central Division's landfill, governed by regulations, restricts unauthorized entry. As a result, CPRs operate in scattered groups within public spaces, influencing the number of participants interviewed.



³ It is important to acknowledge that various factors could have contributed to a comparatively smaller number of participants in the Central Division than in the Western. These factors might include participants being at work during the mapping period, lack of awareness about the mapping exercise, or personal circumstances that prevented their participation or disclosure.

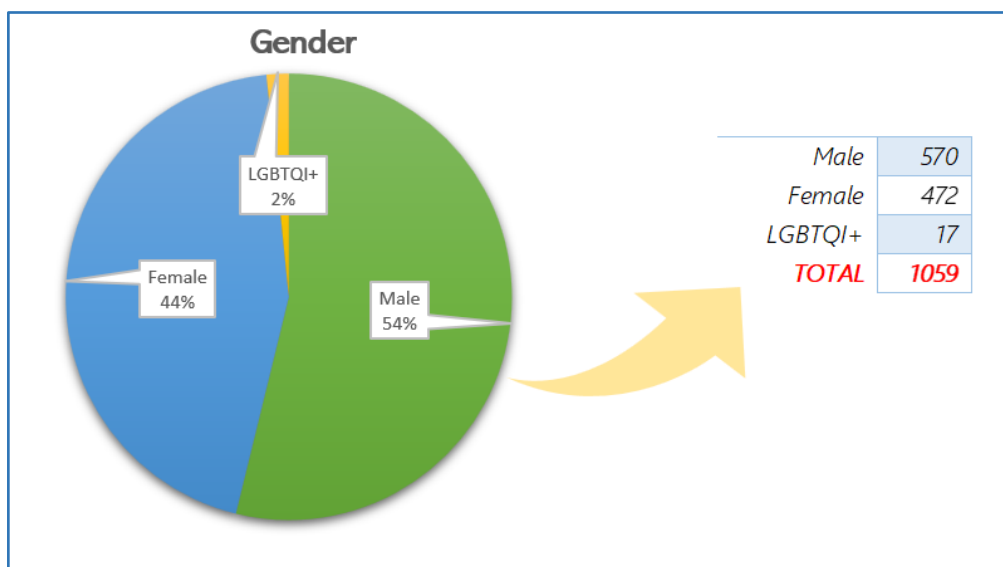
4.2 Characteristics of CPRs

4.2.1 CPR Demographics

Among the 1059 individuals mapped, 309 CPRs were classified as formal, holding roles such as scrap metal agents, municipal garbage collectors, and scrap yard workers. The majority, comprising 750 CPRs, were identified as informal workers, involved in various roles such as dumpsite waste collectors, glass bottle collectors, street waste collectors, scrap metal collectors, and PET bottle collectors.

The interviews revealed that 570 CPRs were male, 472 were female, and 17 belonged to the LGBTQI+ Community.

For the informal waste collection sector, the gender distribution was observed to be 276 males, 457 females, and 17 from the LGBTQI+ Community.⁴



4.2.2 Citizenship

When examining citizenship, 1058 individuals, were identified as Fijian Citizens. Only one individual was reported as a migrant among the CPR population surveyed.

4.2.3 Age Group

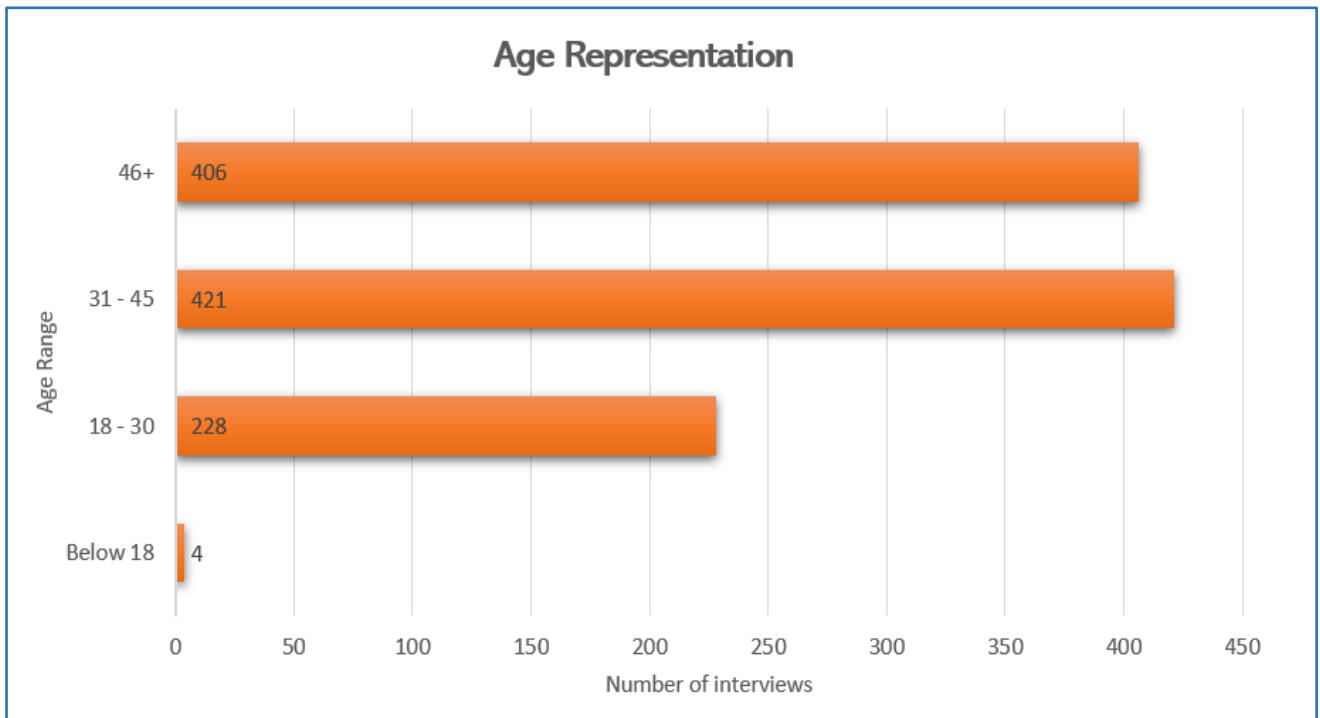
Among the CPRs surveyed, 4 individuals were below the age of 18, indicating the involvement of young individuals in waste management activities.

The age group between 18 and 30 years comprised 228 CPRs, demonstrating the engagement of youth in this sector.

⁴ The representation of the LGBTQI+ community, though seemingly low, could be attributed to underreporting. Not all individuals might have felt comfortable openly discussing their gender identity, making it difficult to recognize the presence of larger LGBTQI+ members within the community.

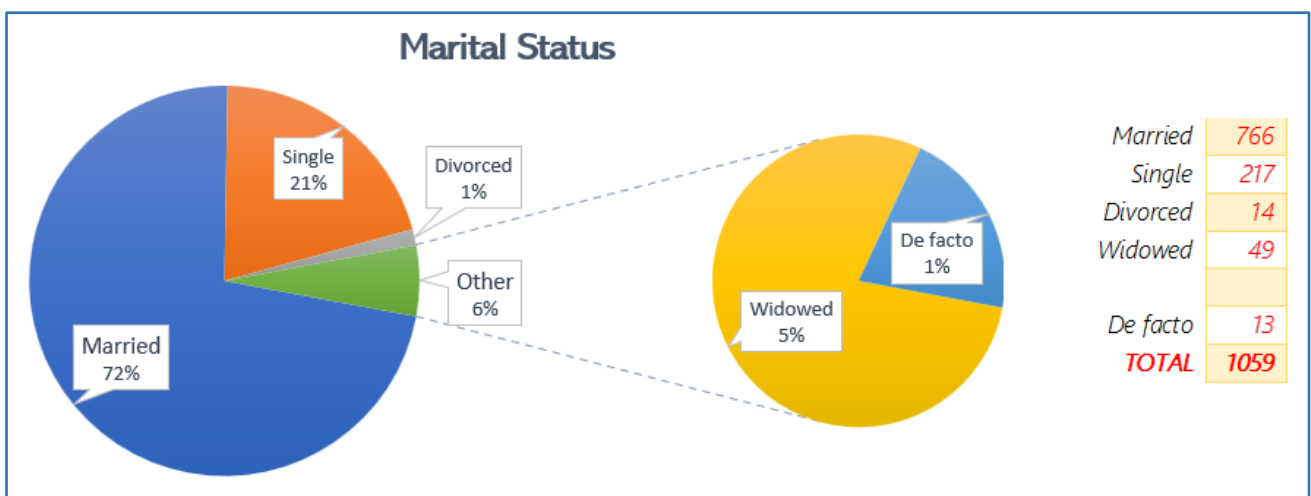
The largest age group observed was between 31 and 45 years, with 421 CPRs falling within this range.

Additionally, 406 CPRs were aged 46 years and above, highlighting the significant representation of experienced individuals in this critical workforce.



4.2.4 Marital Status

The mapping exercise revealed a diverse range of marital statuses among the CPR community. The majority, comprising 766 individuals, reported being married, while 217 identified as single. A smaller number of CPRs mentioned being 14 divorced, 49 widowed, and 13 in a de- facto relationship.



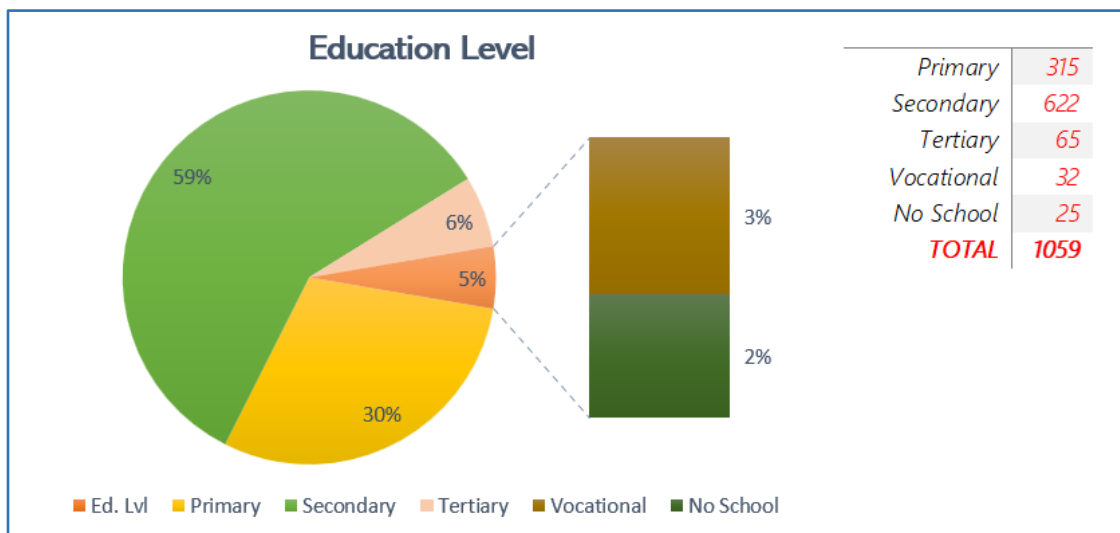
4.2.5 Birth Certificate and TIN

During the mapping exercise, it was revealed that 1046 individuals, possessed a Birth Certificates and TIN (Tax Identification Number). However, the survey highlighted that a small number of CPRs, specifically 13 individuals, did not have these important documents.

4.2.6 Education Level

The survey revealed a diverse range of educational levels among the CPRs interviewed. Among the 1059 CPRs surveyed, the majority held a secondary level of education, with 622 individuals reporting completion of secondary schooling.

Additionally, 315 CPRs had completed primary education, while 65 individuals had attained tertiary education. A smaller number of CPRs reported vocational training as their educational background, with 32 individuals having received vocational education. Furthermore, 25 CPRs indicated that they had not attended school.



SPOTLIGHT STORY

"Instilling the value of hard work and education"

This case study follows a woman who has been a CPR for over four decades, dedicating her life to waste picking and recycling. From a young age, she was exposed to this trade as she helped her parents collect and sell recyclables to support their families. Now, with her own family to take care of, she continues the tradition of waste picking as a means of survival.

Despite the challenges and struggles that come with waste picking, she manages to earn a modest income of \$12-\$15 a day. Though it may seem minimal to some, this income allows her to send her children to school and provide for their basic needs. During tough times when her family had no other means of getting money, they would rely on selling recyclables to buy essential food products.

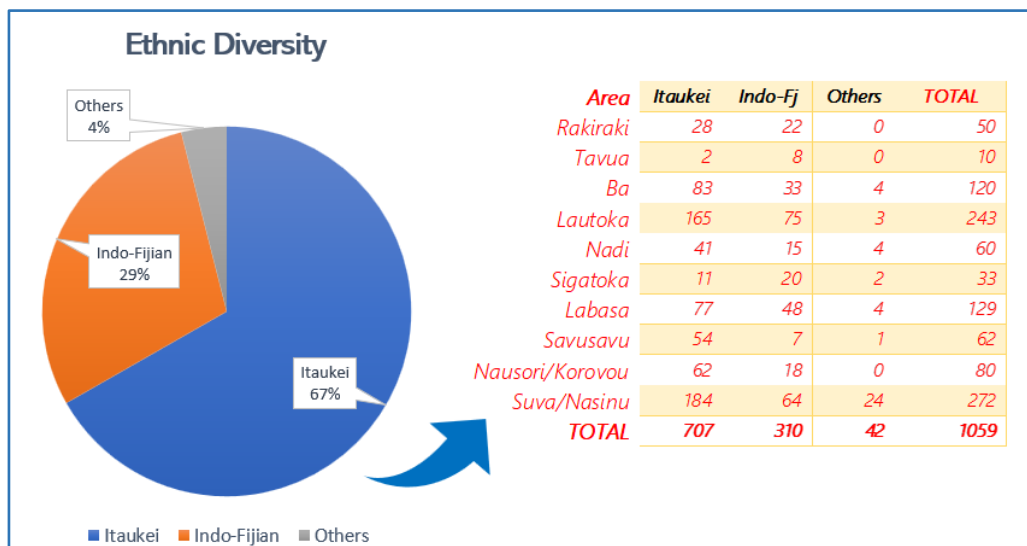
Incredibly, she even involves her entire family in her work. Early in the mornings, she and her children and grandchildren head to the dumpsite together. They share meals there, turning it into a family affair. Unfortunately, this has exposed her family to societal judgments and stereotyping, with people giving them dirty looks and making hurtful comments. Despite facing such challenges, she remains content and unfazed by the world's views.

Education was not readily available to her due to financial constraints, but she cherishes the fact that her children have access to it. Through her perseverance and hard work as a CPR, she has managed to send her children through primary and high school, providing them with the opportunity for a proper education.

Throughout her journey as a CPR, this resilient woman has shown remarkable strength and dedication. Waste picking is not just a job for her; it's a way of life that has shaped her identity and allowed her to support her family's well-being. Despite the hardships and societal pressures, she stands tall as a role model for her children and grandchildren, instilling in them the value of hard work and the importance of education. Her legacy as a Collection Pillar of Recycling will undoubtedly leave a lasting impact on her family and the community she serves.

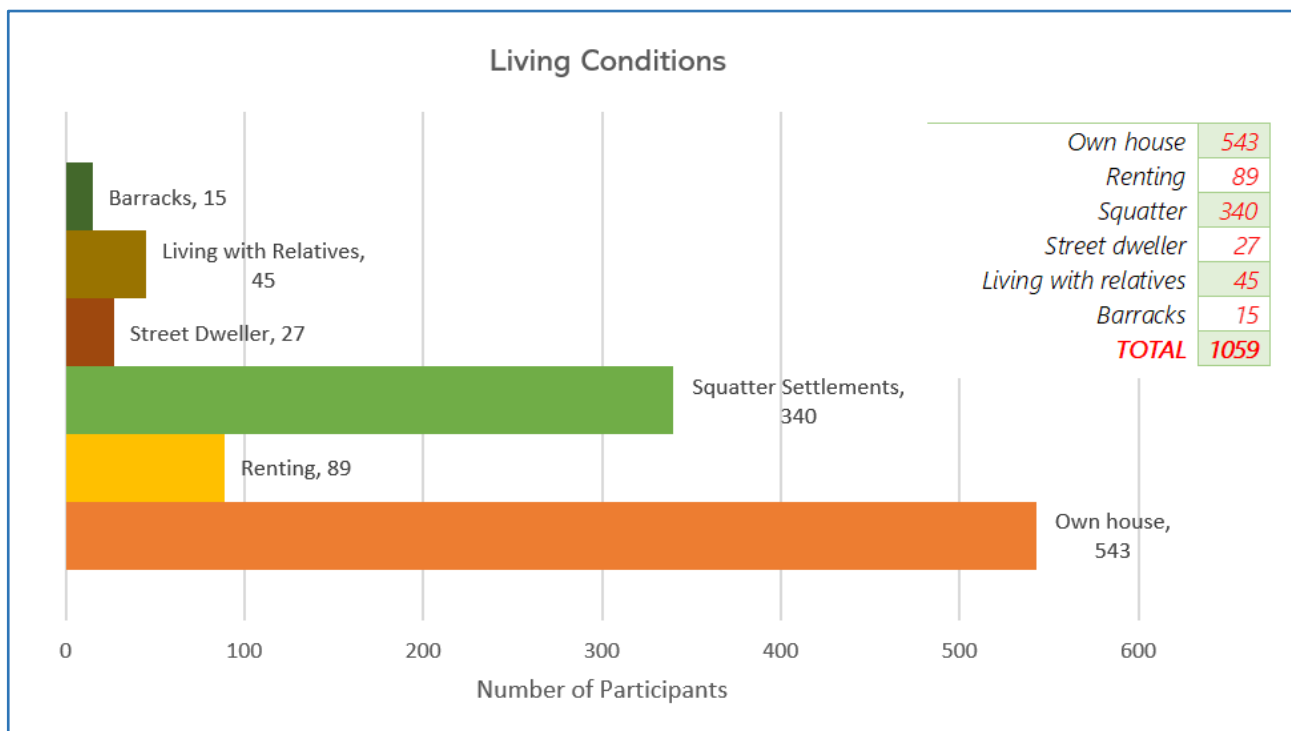
4.2.7 Ethnic Diversity

Among the 1059 CPRs surveyed, the majority of CPRs identified as Itaukei, with 707 individuals belonging to this indigenous Fijian ethnic group. The Indo-Fijian community was also well represented, with 310 CPRs identified. Additionally, there were 42 CPRs from various other ethnic backgrounds. This diversity not only highlights the inclusive and harmonious nature of the CPR community but also underscores the importance of understanding and respecting the cultural nuances and needs of each group in developing sustainable waste management solutions. By recognizing and appreciating this ethnic diversity, stakeholders can collaborate to create comprehensive and culturally sensitive programs that benefit all CPRs across the nation.



4.2.8 Living Conditions

During the mapping exercise, it was highlighted that the majority, 543 individuals, reported living in their own houses, reflecting a level of stability and ownership. Additionally, 340 CPRs identified as squatters, highlighting the prevalence of informal settlements within the community. Furthermore, 89 CPRs reported renting their living spaces, while 45 indicated living with relatives. A smaller number of CPRs, 27 individuals, were identified as street dwellers, facing precarious living conditions with minimal shelter. Moreover, 15 respondents stated that they reside in barracks, indicating the presence of a unique living arrangement among some CPRs.



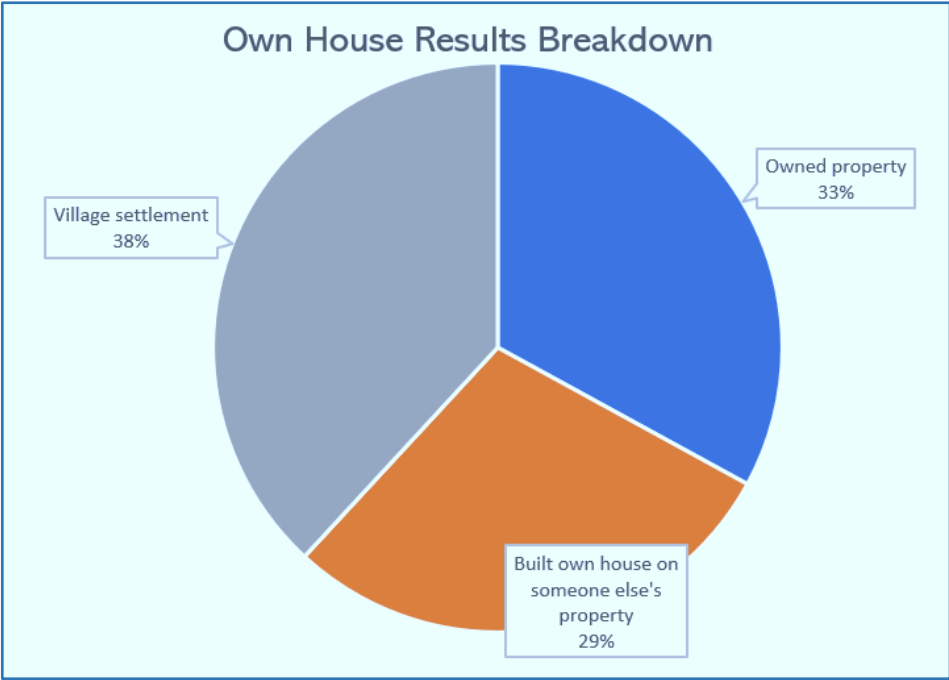
A Breakdown of Own House Results

During the mapping exercise, many CPRs, comprising 543 individuals, reported living in their own houses, reflecting a sense of stability and ownership. However, a further breakdown of the data reveals interesting insights into the diverse nature of their living arrangements.

Among the CPRs who reported living in their own houses, 179 individuals owned the property where their house was situated. This group of CPRs had the advantage of having ownership rights to the land, providing them with a sense of security and control over their living space.

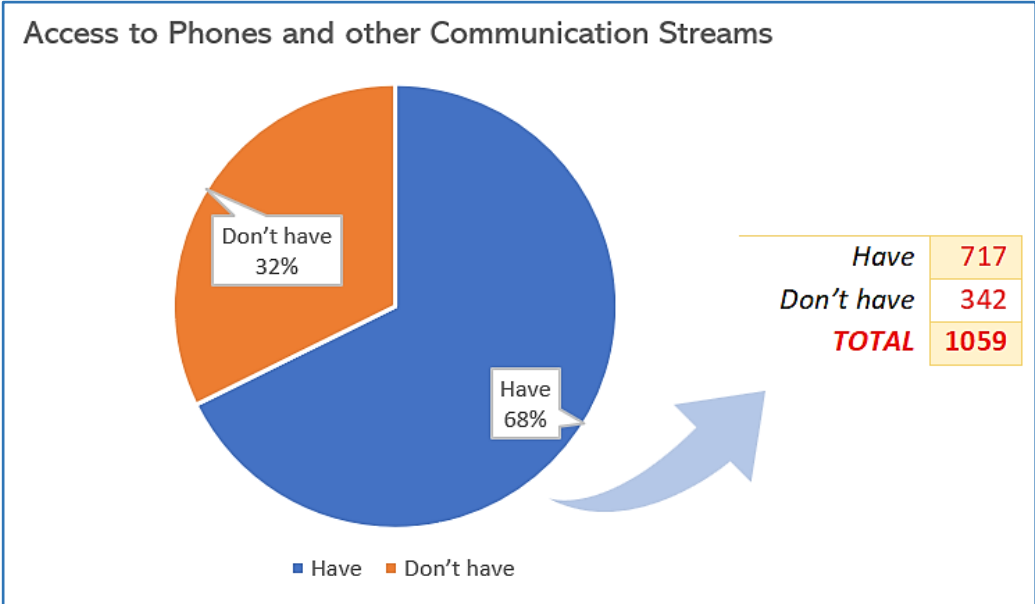
157 individuals mentioned that they had constructed their houses on someone else's property. These CPRs likely built their houses with the permission or arrangement of the landowner, indicating a level of cooperation and community support.

The remaining 207 individuals who reported living in their own houses were part of village settlements. In such cases, CPRs resided in traditional villages, where land ownership is often communal, and houses are built on land collectively owned by the community. This arrangement reflects the close-knit and communal nature of some CPR settlements.



4.2.9 Access to Phones and Other Communication Streams

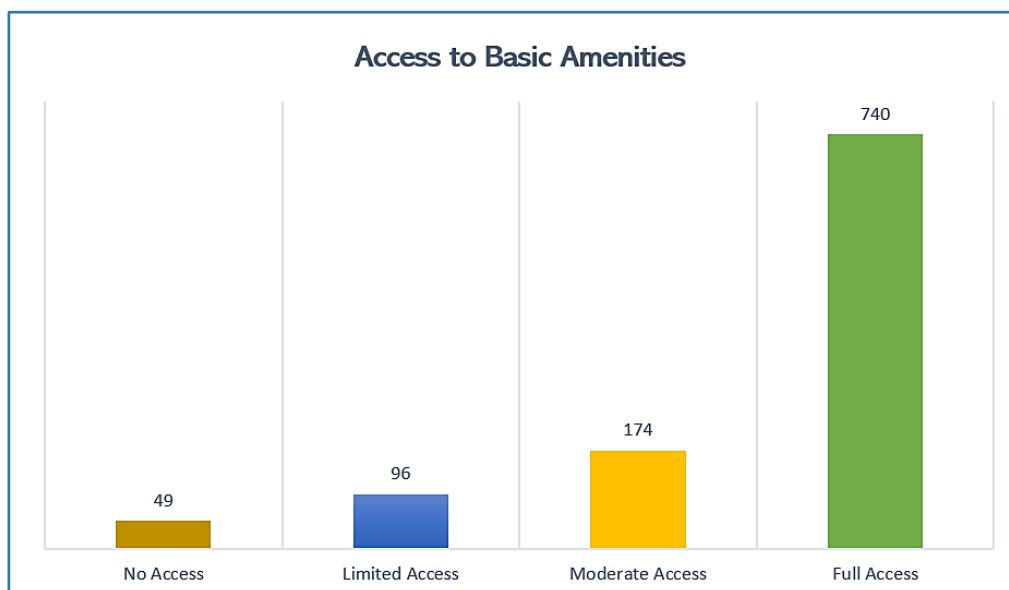
A significant majority of 717 individuals reported having access to mobile phones. This finding highlights the widespread adoption of mobile technology within the CPR community, enabling them to stay connected and access information more easily. However, it is crucial to address the needs of the 342 CPRs who reported not having access to phones, as this may pose challenges in terms of communication, information dissemination, and accessing support services.



4.2.10 Access to Basic Amenities

Access to basic amenities plays a crucial role in their overall well-being and livelihoods. Among the surveyed CPRs, 49 individuals reported having no access to basic amenities, while 96 have limited access. Additionally, 174 CPRs reported having moderate access to basic amenities.

However, a significant majority of CPRs, comprising 740 individuals, have full access to essential amenities. Access to basic amenities is a fundamental aspect that influences CPRs' living conditions, health, and overall quality of life.



4.2.11 Years Involved in Waste Picking

The mapping exercise provided valuable data on the number of years CPRs have been involved in their respective roles. The data presents a diverse range of experience levels within the waste picking community, with some CPRs having dedicated a significant portion of their lives to this profession, while others are relatively new to the sector.

Among the CPRs surveyed, 117 individuals reported being involved in waste picking for less than a year, indicating the presence of newcomers in the field. This suggests that there is a constant influx of individuals exploring waste picking as a means of livelihood or income source.

A substantial number of CPRs, 401 individuals, have been engaged in waste picking for a period ranging from 1 to 5 years. This group likely includes individuals who have established themselves within the waste picking sector and have gained some experience and expertise over the years.

Another significant portion, 265 CPRs, reported having 6 to 10 years of experience in waste picking. These individuals can be considered as seasoned CPRs, with a notable level of proficiency in waste collection and recycling activities.

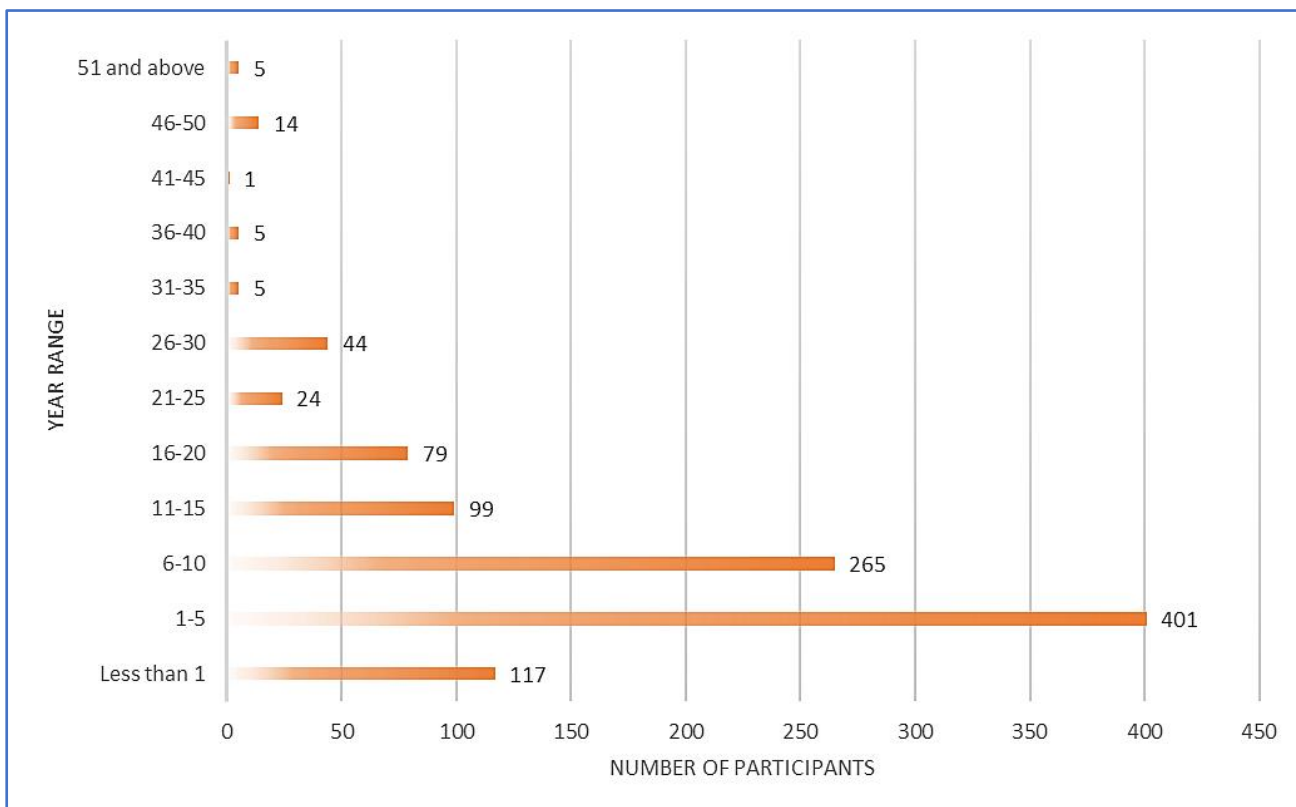
A smaller group of 99 CPRs have been involved in waste picking for 11 to 15 years, demonstrating a long-standing commitment to this critical work. Their experience is likely to have shaped their understanding of waste management practices and contributed to their expertise in the field.

The data also shows that there are CPRs who have been involved in this profession for even more extended periods. For instance, 79 CPRs reported having 16 to 20 years of experience, and 24 individuals have been in the field for 21 to 25 years. These CPRs can be considered as veterans, possessing a wealth of knowledge and experience that can significantly contribute to waste management efforts.

Furthermore, the data highlights that a few CPRs have dedicated more than two and a half decades to waste picking. For instance, 44 individuals have been involved in this profession for 26 to 30 years, and 5 individuals have dedicated 31 to 35 years to waste picking. Their commitment and longevity in the sector demonstrate a deep-rooted passion for waste management and environmental sustainability.

It is worth noting that there are CPRs who have been in the field for even longer periods, such as 14 individuals who have spent 46 to 50 years as CPRs and 5 individuals who have been involved for over 51 years. These CPRs are undoubtedly the pillars of the waste picking community, with unmatched experience and an intimate understanding of waste management challenges and solutions.

Overall, the data on years involved in waste picking reflects the diversity and dedication of the CPR community in Fiji. From newcomers to seasoned professionals, these CPRs play a vital role in sustainable waste management and environmental preservation. Their collective expertise and commitment to their work are essential in creating a cleaner, greener, and more sustainable future for Fiji.

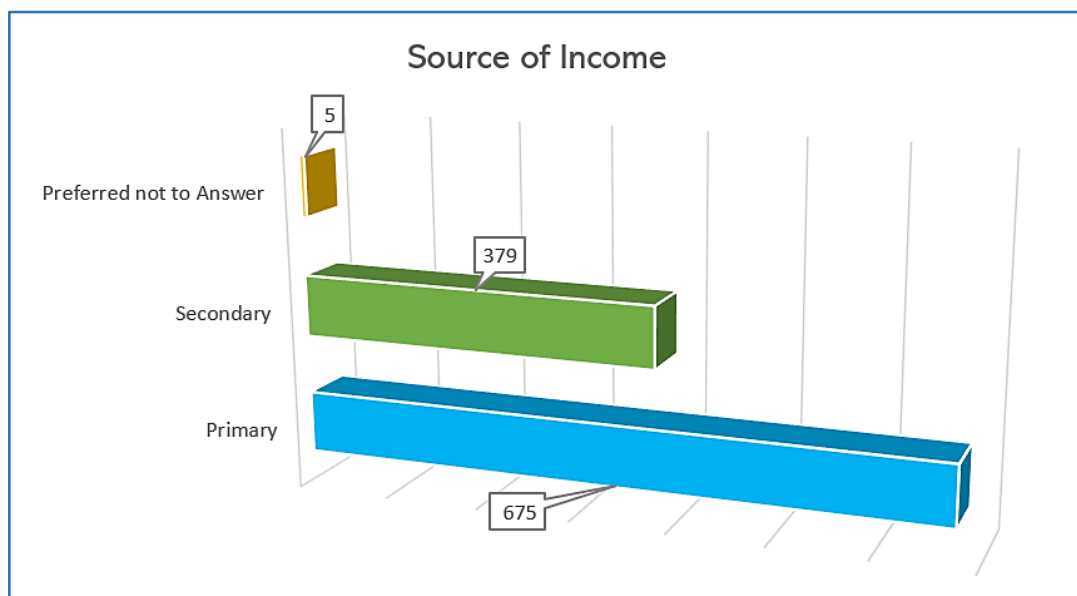


4.3 Working Conditions

4.3.1 Source of Income

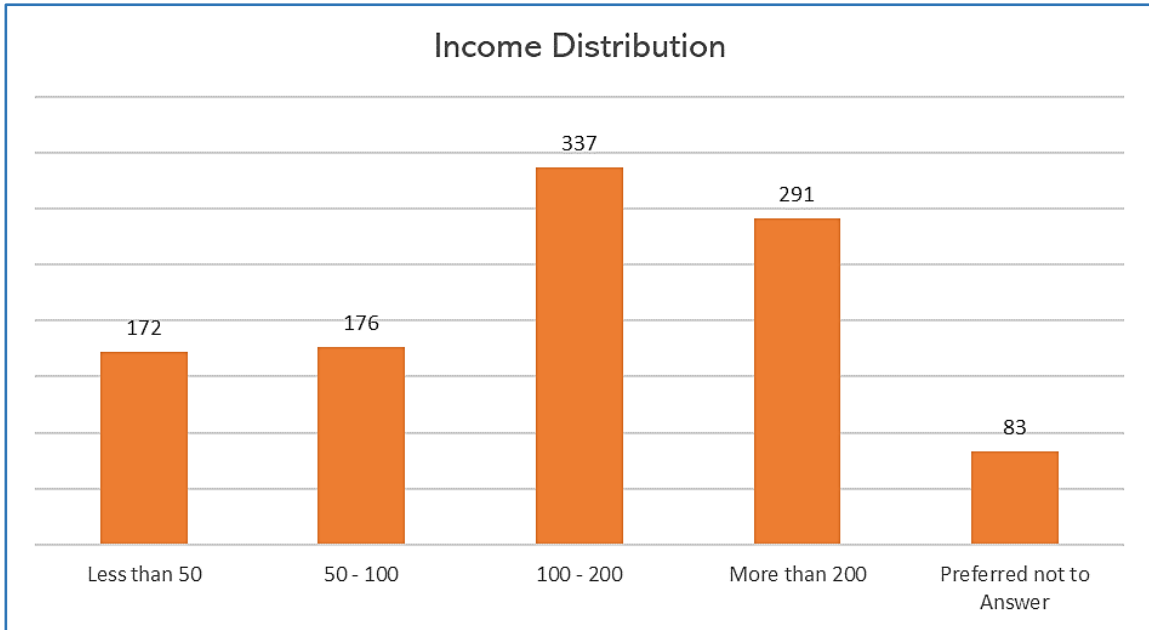
Among the 1059 CPRs surveyed, 675 individuals reported waste collection and selling as their primary source of income. This indicates that a significant portion of the CPRs depend primarily on income earned from waste collection and recycling activities.

Additionally, 379 CPRs stated that their secondary source of income comes from engaging in waste collection practices. It is worth noting that 5 individuals preferred not to answer this question.



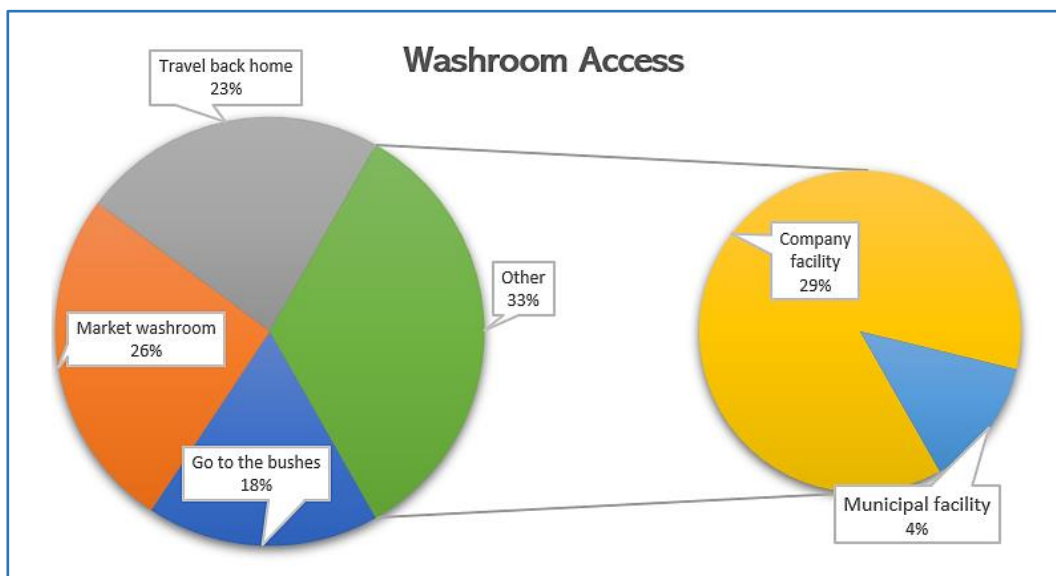
4.3.2 Income Distribution

The mapping exercise had also shed light on the diverse income levels within the CPR community in Fiji. Among the 1059 CPRs surveyed, the majority, 337 individuals, reported earning between 100 and 200 Fijian dollars per week. Following closely, 291 CPRs indicated earning more than 200 Fijian dollars per week, signifying a relatively stable income source. Additionally, 172 CPRs reported earning less than 50 Fijian dollars per week, while 176 CPRs fell within the 50 to 100 Fijian dollar income range. Moreover, there were 83 respondents who did not specify their weekly income.



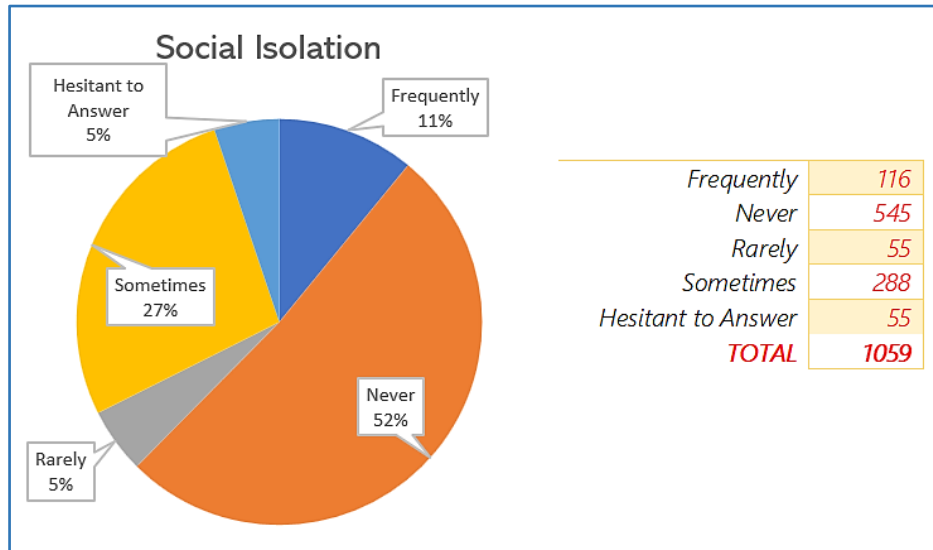
4.3.3 Access to Washroom Facilities

The reality of washroom access among the CPRs in Fiji paints a challenging picture. As we delved into their daily struggles, we discovered that a considerable number, 186 individuals, have no choice but to resort to the bushes for their sanitary needs. The indignity they face is overwhelming. Meanwhile, 274 CPRs find some relief in the market washrooms, a solution that barely meets their basic needs. Another 244 individuals embark on journeys back home just to access a clean facility, sacrificing precious time and energy that could be better spent. A fortunate few, 309 CPRs, have the privilege of using their company's facilities, but even that doesn't ensure their dignity is upheld. Lastly, only 46 CPRs have access to municipal facilities, leaving us to question whether enough is being done to support these essential workers.



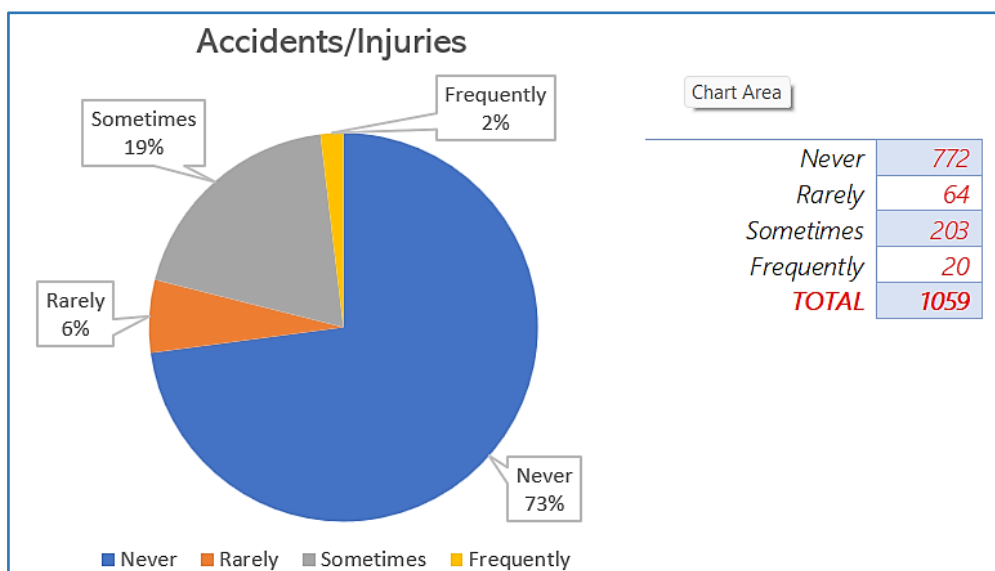
4.3.4 Social Isolation and Its Impact on CPRs' Work

Among the CPRs interviewed, 545 individuals reported never experiencing social isolation, while 288 mentioned experiencing it sometimes. 116 CPRs reported frequent social isolation, indicating a potential impact on their mental well-being and overall work experience. Additionally, 55 respondents were hesitant to answer this question.



4.3.5 Accidents/Injuries

Among the CPRs surveyed, an overwhelming majority of 772 individuals reported never experiencing accidents or injuries in their line of work.⁵ However, 64 CPRs mentioned rare occurrences of accidents, while 203 individuals reported experiencing injuries sometimes. A smaller fraction of CPRs, 20 individuals, revealed

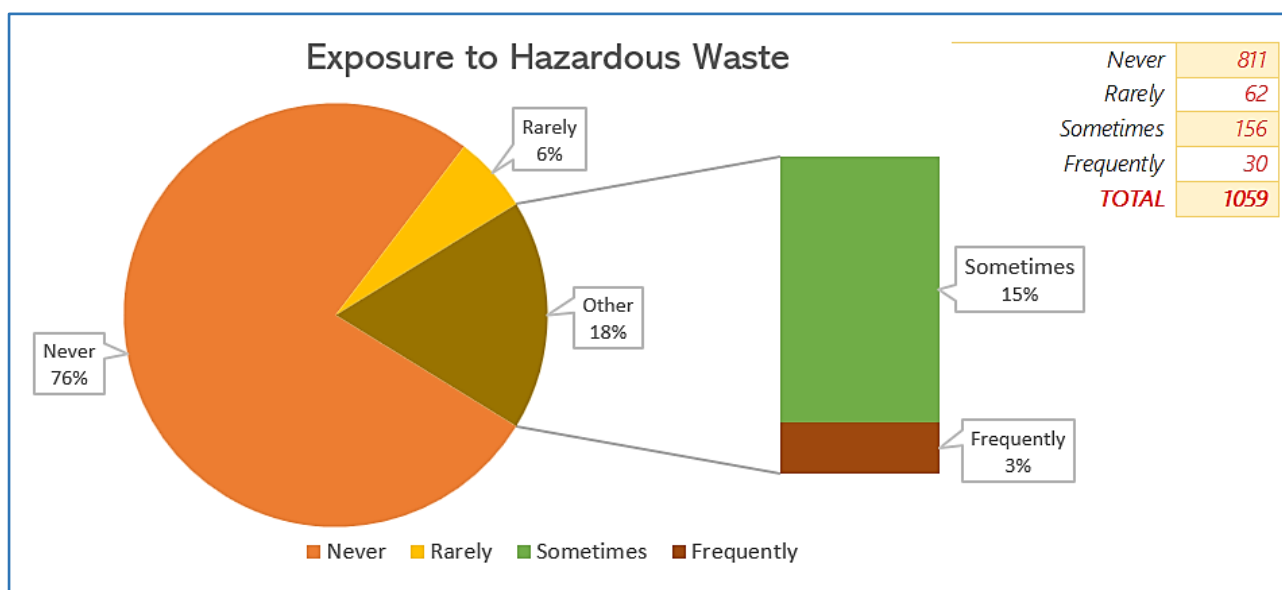


⁵ Many waste pickers may become so accustomed to their work environment that they might not perceive injuries or accidents. Moreover, some may have hesitated to report injuries, fearing that they would get targeted by the higher authorities. Another observation made by the team was that the CPRs encountered during the entirety of the exercise had very little to no PPEs provisioned.

facing accidents or injuries more frequently. These statistics highlight the importance of addressing occupational safety and health concerns within the waste management sector.

4.3.6 Exposure to Hazardous Waste

The mapping exercise revealed valuable insights into their exposure to hazardous waste, especially at dumpsites. A significant majority of 811 CPRs reported never encountering hazardous waste during their work, indicating a favorable condition in their waste collection practices.⁶ However, 62 CPRs mentioned rare occurrences of dealing with hazardous materials, while 156 individuals reported encountering such waste sometimes. A smaller portion, comprising 30 CPRs, revealed facing hazardous waste more frequently.



This data underscores the importance of proper waste management practices and the need to implement measures that reduce the generation and improper disposal of hazardous materials. Ensuring CPRs' safety and health is essential, and it can be achieved through comprehensive waste management systems that prioritize the identification and proper handling of hazardous waste materials, ultimately contributing to a safer and healthier environment for both CPRs and the community.

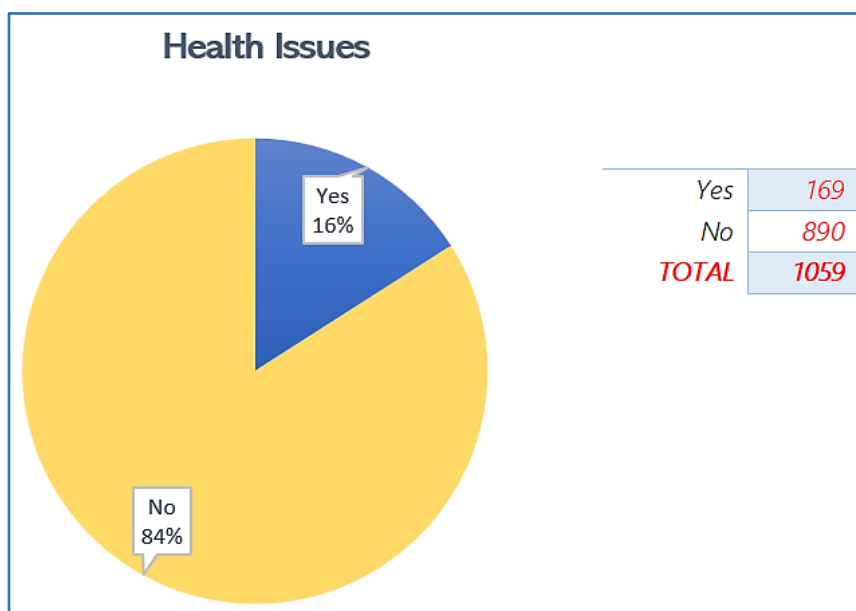
4.3.7 Health Issues

Among the respondents, 169 CPRs reported experiencing health issues related to their work, indicating potential occupational hazards and health risks associated with waste collection and handling. On the other

⁶ The apparent contrast between the larger number of CPRs reporting "never" encountering hazardous waste and the hazardous conditions of dumpsites can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the term "hazardous waste" might not be uniformly understood among CPRs, leading to underreporting and signifies a need for training. Additionally, the nature of dumpsites, where various types of waste are mixed, could make identifying specific hazardous materials more challenging for CPRs. CPRs who frequent dumpsites might have become accustomed to the presence of certain hazards, considering them as a routine part of their work. This normalization of hazardous conditions might influence their perception and reporting of such encounters.

hand, a significant majority of 890 CPRs stated that they did not face any health issues, which is encouraging but should not overshadow the importance of addressing the health and safety concerns of CPRs.

The findings underscore the need for comprehensive health and safety measures to protect CPRs from potential hazards and ensure their well-being in the waste management process. Implementing proper safety protocols and providing access to healthcare resources can significantly contribute to improving the overall health outcomes of CPRs and supporting their well-being within the community.



4.4 Types of Waste Collectors

4.4.1 Formal Waste Collectors

Formal waste collectors are individuals engaged in waste management activities within registered company or council. These CPRs are recognized as part of the formal economy and operate with structured labor work. A detailed tabular description of the demographic and social characteristics can be seen in the table below.

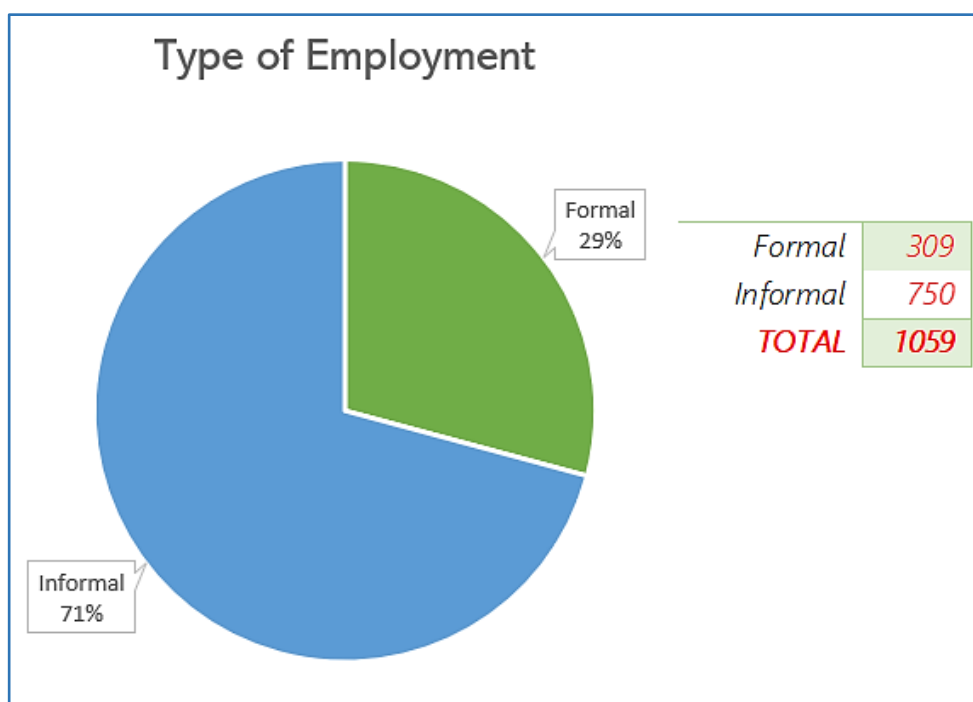
Area	Glass Collectors (Depot)	Scrap Metal Agents	Scrap Yard Workers	Garbage Collectors
Rakiraki	7	2	0	5
Tavua	0	0	0	4
Ba	6	3	0	8
Lautoka	35	6	16	18
Nadi	0	3	0	13
Sigatoka	0	0	0	1
Labasa	18	2	0	17
Savusavu	0	1	0	7
Nausori/Korovou	21	5	0	12
Suva/Nasinu	32	12	16	39
TOTAL	119	34	32	124

4.4.2 Informal Waste Collectors

Informal waste collectors, on the other hand, are individuals engaged in waste management activities and often operate independently or in small groups. These CPRs often work without official registration or recognition, making their livelihood through the collection of recyclable materials from various sources like dumpsites, streets, and market areas. A detailed tabular description of the demographic and social characteristics can be seen in the table below.

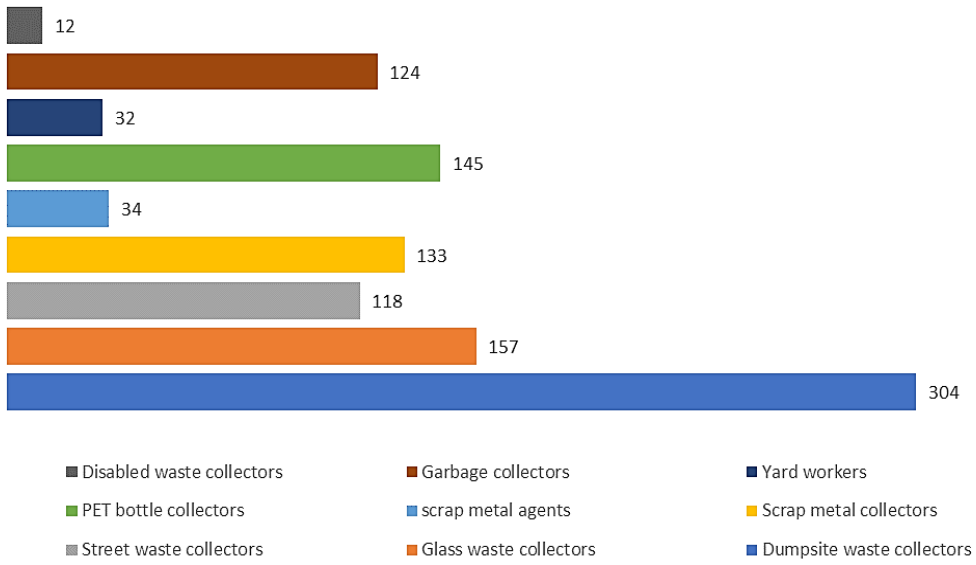
Area	Dumpsite	Glass Collectors (Independent)	Street Waste Collectors	Scrap metal collectors	PET Bottle collectors	Disabled waste collectors
Rakiraki	16	3	4	7	4	2
Tavua	0	1	2	0	3	0
Ba	60	4	8	12	17	2
Lautoka	112	2	20	9	25	0
Nadi	0	11	9	7	16	1
Sigatoka	31	0	0	1	0	0
Labasa	46	3	13	12	18	0
Savusavu	39	2	6	4	3	0
Nausori/Korovou	0	1	10	12	18	1
Suva/Nasinu	0	11	46	69	41	6
TOTAL	304	38	118	133	145	12

4.4.2 Overall Outlook of Waste Collectors in Fiji

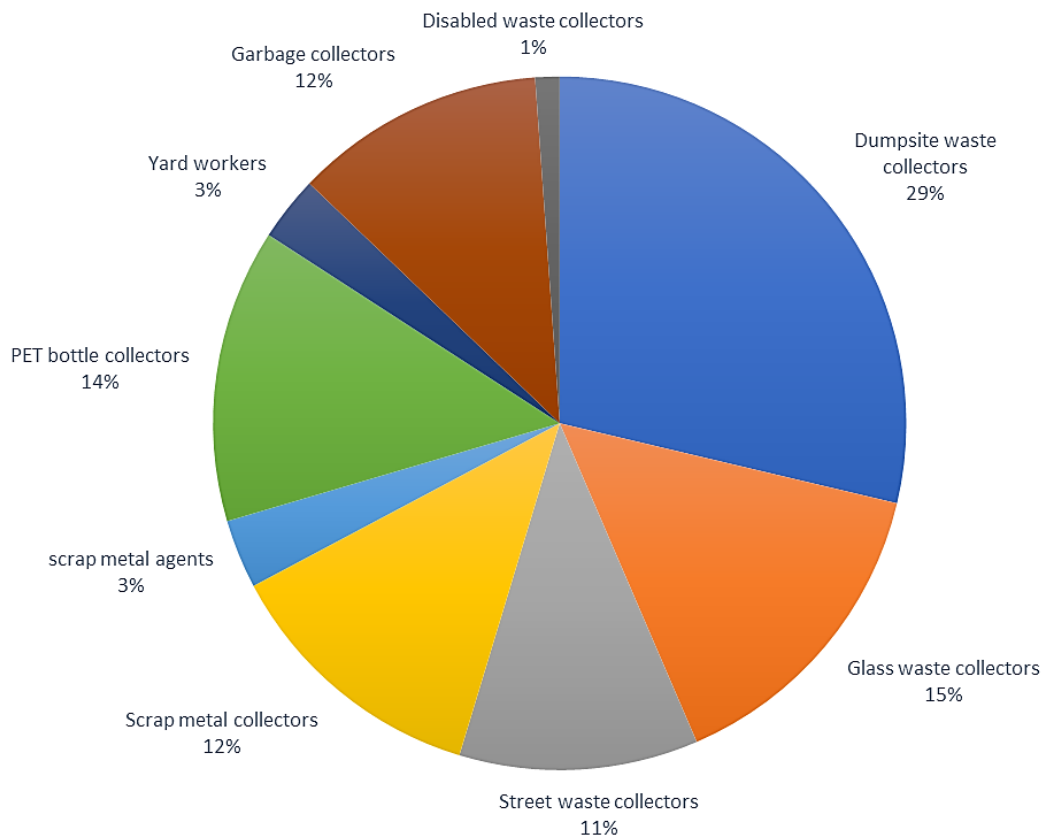


Area	Dumpsite	Glass Collectors	Street Waste Collectors	Scrap metal collectors	Scrap metal agents	PET Bottle collectors	Yard Workers	Garbage Collectors	Disabled waste collectors	TOTAL
Rakiraki	16	10	4	7	2	4	0	5	2	50
Tavua	0	1	2	0	0	2	0	4	0	10
Ba	60	10	8	12	3	17	0	8	2	120
Lautoka	112	37	20	9	6	25	16	18	0	243
Nadi	0	11	9	7	3	16	0	13	1	60
Sigatoka	31	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	33
Labasa	46	21	13	12	2	18	0	17	0	129
Savusavu	39	2	6	4	1	3	0	7	0	62
Nausori/Korovou	0	22	10	12	5	18	0	12	1	80
Suva/Nasinu	0	43	46	69	12	41	16	39	6	272
TOTAL	304	157	118	133	34	144	32	124	12	1059

Overall Outlook of CPR Categories in Fiji



Overall Outlook of CPRs in Fiji (%)



Chapter 5: Challenges Faced by CPRs

5.1 Experiences of Social Isolation and Discrimination

CPRs in Fiji face pervasive social isolation and discrimination due to their waste picking activities. This subtopic explores the distressing experiences CPRs endure, including name-calling, stigmatization, and exclusion. The impact of such discrimination on their mental well-being and social interactions is deeply significant. It is crucial to address these issues to create an inclusive and empathetic society that values the contributions of CPRs.

5.1.1 Hiding and Fearing Judgment

Many CPRs recall instances where they felt the need to hide or avoid public spaces when vehicles passed by. The fear of judgment and mockery from passersby becomes a constant burden, hindering CPRs from fully participating in their communities and social gatherings.

5.1.2 Family and Community Stigma

The mapping team found that some CPRs were subjected to derogatory name-calling, with terms like *"malich"* meaning dirty in Fiji Hindi, being used to label them. CPRs have shared stories of family members refusing to visit their homes due to misconceptions that their utensils are sourced from the dump. Even during prayer sessions, some relatives withhold food offerings, further perpetuating the stigmatization.

5.1.3 Discrimination at the Dumpsite

CPRs, especially those who scavenge at dumpsites, often face bullying and discrimination based on their appearance and occupation. The discriminatory treatment from others creates a hostile working environment and further isolates CPRs from their peers.

Some CPRs have also highlighted that sometimes they encounter aggressive behavior from some council employees while collecting rubbish at dumpsites or on streets.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"I was told that you don't fit in"

A 55-year-old widow who has been a part of the waste picking community in the Western Division, for the past decade. Living in the West for more than two decades, she embarked on her waste picking journey with her late husband ten years ago. Their home was situated in a flood-prone area, prompting them to consider elevating the foundation of their house. With limited job opportunities and a lack of formal education, they turned to the dumpsite as a means to earn income and finance the renovation of their home.

After the passing of her husband, she now lives alone. Her children have grown and established their own families, yet her dream of building a proper house remains alive. Motivated by this aspiration, she diligently saves the earnings from selling her recyclables to work towards fulfilling her goal.

Despite facing discrimination from younger CPRs and enduring incidents of stolen recyclables from her home. Her spirit remains unshaken. The challenges she encounters do not deter her, and she persists in her efforts to build her dream house, piece by piece.

Her unwavering determination and resilience shine through as she continues to navigate the waste picking landscape. Through the years, she has found strength in her work, embracing waste picking as a source of empowerment and self-reliance. By turning waste into opportunity, she not only supports herself but also proves that age is no barrier to pursuing one's goals.

In her pursuit of a dream, this determined widow stands tall as a testament to the indomitable human will and the transformative potential of waste picking. Her story reminds us all that no dream is too big to achieve, and every step towards progress counts, regardless of the hurdles along the way.

5.1.4 Children of CPRs

Children of CPRs also experience discrimination and stigma at school and in their communities. A CPR highlighted that some classmates of his child call her "girl from the dump," subjecting them to ridicule and social exclusion, affecting their educational experiences and overall well-being.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"I have not told my children that I collect bottles"

A woman CPR who is involved in the collection of plastic revealed that soon after she started waste picking, she stopped for a while. This is because she felt judged by the community and began to look at her "differently". She spoke about her women in her village began to distance themselves from her and did not involve her in planning for functions and ceremonies. The CPR said after a short while of stopping her work, she restarted the collection. This is because she realized that if she stopped doing her work, those judging her negatively would not help feed her family. She said she felt stronger and although she did not have any professional counseling, she managed to self-talk herself out of her self-doubt.

The same woman also mentioned that while her husband knows that she is a CPR, she has not been able to share this with her children, especially that fact that she collects plastic bottles from the streets. The main reason for this is she does not want her children to feel stigmatized about her work. She also feels that her eldest son, who is 21 years old, will be angry if he finds out that she collects bottles from the streets and will stop her.

5.5.5 Impact on Mental Well-being and Social Interactions

The constant experiences of social isolation and discrimination take a toll on the mental well-being of CPRs. The stigma attached to their profession affects their ability to interact freely with their communities and participate in social gatherings.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“I have been homeless for over two decades”

A 35-year-old woman has been living on the streets for more than 20 years, facing the challenges of homelessness and poverty. Despite the hardships she has endured, she exemplifies incredible resilience and determination as she navigates life as a street dweller.

She currently resides in an old, abandoned house near a river with a man in his 50s, who is also a fellow street dweller. The duo relies on cardboard for seating and sleeping arrangements. For bathing and hygiene needs, they resort to the river, which serves as their source of water.

Two years ago, she suffered a severe knee injury, making it difficult for her to walk long distances. However, her resilience and determination have not waned. Despite the injury, she continues to scavenge the streets, collecting recyclables such as PET bottles, cans, clothes, cardboard, scrap metals, and glass bottles to sell.

Through her efforts in collecting and selling recyclables, she has managed to sustain herself and the man she lives with, whom she considers a good friend. The meager earnings from her recycling activities allow her to put food on the table and meet their basic needs.

During the interview, she was wearing wet clothes despite the cold weather. She displayed little concern for her discomfort and carried on with the conversation. This endurance underscores the harsh realities she faces daily, yet she remains resilient in her pursuit of survival.

Throughout the interview process, she exhibited signs of resentment and fear, expressing reluctance to engage in an open conversation. These signs point to a possible traumatic response from past experiences. With the assistance of relevant NGO's, she is taking steps towards healing from her traumatic past and embracing hope for a better future. As we continue to work towards building a more inclusive and caring society, stories like hers remind us of the importance of empathy, support, and resilience in uplifting the lives of the most vulnerable among us.

5.2 Safety and Security Concerns Faced by CPRs

5.2.1 Incidents of Violence

CPRs are often exposed to incidents of violence and harassment during their work. Some bottle collectors have stated that there are often disputes over the price of beer bottles which at times escalate into verbal and physical altercations. Additionally, there have been reports of CPRs being robbed while handling cash, leaving them vulnerable to criminal activities.

5.2.2 Safety Concerns and Vulnerability to Crime

Waste picking areas can be hazardous, with numerous potential risks and safety concerns. In some instances, CPRs have faced confrontations and fights with others over PET bottles on the streets. These conflicts not only pose physical risks but also create a hostile environment for CPRs while they are trying to earn a livelihood. The presence of intoxicated individuals in market areas and streets poses another significant threat to CPRs' safety and security. These individuals may engage in aggressive behaviors, leading to potential confrontations and harassment.

5.2.3 Fear of Stigmatization and Job Security

Certain CPRs, especially those collecting PET bottles as a secondary source of income, express fear of being discovered by their employers. They worry that their employment may be jeopardized if their employers find out they are working outside of their regular hours. This fear adds to the stress and vulnerability experienced by these CPRs.

5.2.4 Harassment from Council Workers

Dumpsite workers often encounter harassment and verbal abuse from council workers. The mistreatment by those in authority undermines CPRs' dignity and rights, making their work environment hostile and challenging. Some council officials have asked CPRs at dumpsites to hide when important people visit, making them feel ashamed. These officials are sometimes harsh and verbally abusive, demanding money from the CPRs. These challenges highlight the need for better understanding and support for CPRs' rights and dignity in their essential role in waste management.

It's important to note that these challenges are not applicable to all municipal councils. While some CPRs face mistreatment and harassment from certain council officials, this does not reflect the attitude or ethical alignments of all municipal councils.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“I was told to hide in the bushes”

A 58-year-old CPR from the Western Division has dedicated five decades of his life to waste picking, a profession that is often overlooked and underappreciated. Despite the challenges he faces daily, his commitment to providing for his family and his unwavering passion for recycling and environmental preservation have made him an inspiring figure within the community.

His journey into waste picking began during his childhood when he discovered the joy of collecting and selling recyclables, particularly when visiting the beach. Over the years, this hobby evolved into a primary source of income for him, supporting his family of five, including his loving wife and four children. As the sole breadwinner, he sells eggs from his home, and his wife also contributes to the family income through her work.

His experience as a CPR has not been without challenges. He has encountered social isolation and faced discrimination due to the nature of his work. **Some community members and even council officials would ask the CPRs to hide when high-ranking individuals or ministers visited the dumpsite, further perpetuating the stigma associated with waste picking.**

His children, who are now educated and successful, did face some obstacles in their education journey. One of his children dropped out of school due to distance and financial constraints, but the others have received support through free education and bus fare cards. His commitment to his family's well-being has resulted in his children receiving proper nutrition and access to education, ensuring they have bright futures ahead.

His dream is to witness improvements in the waste picking sector, such as better safety measures, accessibility to essential services, and more support for his children's education. His resilience and dedication have made him an integral part of the community, and he hopes that one day, CPRs like him will be recognized and respected for their invaluable contributions to recycling and environmental sustainability.

5.2.5 Workplace Accidents and Injuries

The nature of waste picking work exposes individuals to workplace accidents and injuries. One CPR experienced a gas cylinder falling on their leg when offloading scrap metals from a truck, highlighting the physical risks they face daily.

5.3 Health and Safety Risks Faced by CPRs

5.3.1 Feelings of Fear and Anxiety

CPRs often experience feelings of fear and anxiety while working. The unsafe nature of their job, coupled with the risk of encountering aggressive individuals or facing harassment, can lead to heightened stress levels. Fear of stigmatization and discrimination further compounds their emotional burden, impacting their mental well-being and overall quality of life.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“A CPR's transformative journey unfolds”

This case study explores a CPR's determination, resilience, and the challenges she has faced on her path to empowerment.

She moved to the Western Division after marriage. She and her husband were blessed with two sons. To support her family financially, she turned to collecting recyclables from the dumpsite. Over the course of five years, her dedication and hard work allowed her to generate a steady income from selling copper, PET bottles, clothes, shoes, cans, and scrap metals.

Through the earnings from her recycling efforts, she accomplished a significant milestone - she purchased her own land. This achievement is a testament to her determination and the value she finds in her work as a CPR.

Despite her work burden, she also took on the responsibility of looking after her father until his passing the previous year. Her compassionate nature extends beyond her immediate family, as she supported her brother in sending her niece to medical school, all through the income generated from selling recyclables. Even her niece remains unaware of the source of this support.

Working at the dumpsite, she faces numerous challenges, the most significant being her fear of being caught by the council. While she finds pride and purpose in her work, she hides her identity as a CPR from her husband's family, who are well-off. Her husband, although aware of her role, does not fully support her and disapproves of her involvement in recycling.

Her resourcefulness shines through as she uses her recycling earnings to start her own cake business. This entrepreneurial endeavor not only contributes to her family's income but also showcases her determination to explore new opportunities for growth.

Despite the challenges and struggles she faces; she finds contentment in her ability to support her family through the money earned from selling recyclables. Her resilience and dedication serve as an inspiration to those around her.

5.3.2 Access to Healthcare and Denial of Medical Assistance

Access to healthcare is a pressing issue for CPRs. Some CPRs have shared their experiences of being denied medical assistance due to their appearance or occupation. Being turned away from clinics based on their work contributes to the marginalization of CPRs and hampers their right to essential healthcare services.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“My wife was told not continuously come to the health center”

A CPR from the Western Division spends his days sifting through the waste at the dumpsite, working tirelessly to make ends meet. His life is an embodiment of grit and determination, as he has faced numerous challenges in his journey as a CPR.

During our interview, he disclosed the difficulties he encountered while collecting waste. Many people were reluctant to give him waste items. People usually told him “We would rather throw this away than give it to you.” This perception of people had added an extra layer of hardship to his already difficult life. However, he was not alone in his endeavors. His wife, a once-orphaned young woman, stood by his side, supporting him in their waste-picking journey. Together, they traveled the streets, gathering recyclables to sustain their livelihood.

Tragically, his wife suffered from chronic health issues, including asthma, which plagued her ability to help her husband out. Seeking medical attention became a struggle for her as she faced repeated blame for her frequent hospital visits, hindering her access to the essential treatment she desperately required.

He and his wife relied on the support of their extended family, who provided them with food to survive. His lack of any qualifications left him with no choice but to continue waste picking, making it challenging to break free from the cycle of poverty. Last year, he experienced the heart-wrenching loss of his beloved wife due to her deteriorating health condition, leaving him widowed and devastated.

One unfortunate day while waste picking at the dumpsite, he suffered an injury when his leg slipped into a hidden hole. The incident left him temporarily weakened and further complicated the already tough circumstances of his life. Adding to his struggles, a bureaucratic error led to a death certificate being issued in his name, marking him as deceased.

The physically demanding nature of waste picking took its toll on his health. He endured shortness of breath, blisters, and rashes as common afflictions. Moreover, the lack of proper washroom facilities left him with no choice but to resort to using bushes while waste picking, compromising his dignity and overall well-being.

He has encountered harassment, and even being chased away by people who failed to recognize the importance of his work. Additionally, sometimes, his hard-earned recyclables get stolen, dealing a heavy blow to his earnings.

The struggle for survival is a constant battle for this CPR. Some days, he works without any meals. At times, some kind-hearted individuals offered food during his waste-picking, while there are instances when he receives nothing at all. Clean drinking water was a luxury he could not always afford.

5.3.3 Health Issues Related to Waste Picking Activities

CPRs are prone to a range of health issues arising from their work environment. The repetitive motion of heavy lifting can cause lower abdominal pain, affecting their physical health. Exposure to chemical waste poses significant risks, with some CPRs reporting difficulty in breathing and respiratory problems. Additionally, working in adverse weather conditions, such as picking bottles in rain and cold mornings, can lead to cold and flu symptoms.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“To support my family, I became a CPR”

This case study follows the inspirational journey of a CPR who, despite facing significant health challenges, found purpose and support.

Ten years ago, he suffered three major heart attacks while working in a local construction company. The severity of his health issues compelled his eldest daughter to intervene, fearing for his life. Consequently, he left his job and spent three years focusing on recovering his health and engaging in farming activities.

After regaining strength and seeking a means to support his family, he decided to become a CPR. For the past seven years, he has been collecting various types of scrap metals, cans, and copper, selling them at a recycling facility to earn income. His family, especially his wife, has been incredibly supportive of his new role, often joining him on weekends to collect recyclables.

As with any journey, there have been challenges to overcome. One of the significant hurdles he faced was social isolation. Having previously held a good job at a construction company, transitioning to being a CPR brought changes in his social interactions. However, the camaraderie and support he found among other CPRs have been invaluable, and they stand by each other on difficult days.

Despite experiencing health-related setbacks and economic challenges, he has not received any form of government assistance. His attempts to secure social welfare support were declined. Nevertheless, he remains determined to support his family through his work as a CPR.

He finds great fulfillment in his work, even amidst the challenges. He believes that working in the dumpsite is rewarding, as he contributes to recycling efforts and promotes a sustainable environment. While he wishes not to be judged by others, he takes pride in his role as a CPR. From a near-death experience and leaving behind a stable job to embracing a new path as a CPR, he showcases unwavering determination and dedication. Supported by his family and fellow CPRs, he continues to find fulfillment and purpose in contributing to the recycling community.

5.3.4 Accidents and Injuries

Waste picking exposes individuals to various occupational hazards, resulting in accidents and injuries. For instance, CPRs may suffer cuts or injuries while handling sharp objects at dumpsites. One CPR's unfortunate experience of falling on barbed wires while trying to escape from council workers underscores the dangers they encounter in their daily work.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“Overcoming an injury and embracing the role of a CPR”

This case study follows a CPR who has been involved in waste picking since a young age. From his early days, he valued independence and sought ways to earn money without relying on others. During weekends and school breaks, he would head to the dumpsite to collect cans and scrap metals, which he would then sell to generate some income.

Prior to becoming a Collection Pillar of Recycling (CPR), he had been employed, but an unfortunate injury left him unable to wear closed shoes. As a result, he now has to wear flip-flops everywhere he goes. Despite the challenge, he embraced the opportunity to become a CPR, as it allowed him to work without the need for closed shoes. He is willing to take the risk to support his family, which consists of five children, all currently attending primary school.

Through his hard work and determination, he has managed to build a house for his family and provide for their needs. The income he earns from selling recyclables has become a significant source of support, and he takes pride in the fact that he can sustain his household independently. As a father and caregiver, he demonstrates the value of hard work and the importance of taking risks to secure a better future for his loved ones. His journey as a CPR showcases the transformative power of recycling, not only in creating a sustainable income but also in building a home and supporting a family's dreams.

5.4 Exposure to Hazardous Waste

5.4.1 Frequency of Exposure to Hazardous Materials

CPRs, especially those who collect recyclables from the dumpsites are regularly exposed to hazardous materials during their work. Instances of encountering chemical substances, such as acids and unknown liquids, are common at waste collection points, including hotels. Additionally, encounters with potentially infectious materials, such as used needles and medical waste, pose significant risks to CPRs' health and safety.



A CPR collecting recyclables at the dumpsite.
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

5.4.2 Respiratory Issues and Skin Irritations

Exposure to hazardous waste can result in respiratory issues and skin irritations for CPRs. Inhaling fumes from burning waste at dumpsites can lead to respiratory problems and respiratory tract infections. Furthermore, handling waste materials without adequate protection can cause skin irritations, burns, and allergies due to direct contact with harmful substances.

5.4.3 Importance of Proper Waste Management

Proper waste management practices play a crucial role in minimizing hazardous waste exposure for CPRs. Implementing efficient waste sorting, storage, and disposal methods can reduce the risk of encountering dangerous materials. For instance, disposing of medical waste in dedicated containers and incinerating hazardous waste in controlled environments can prevent its dispersion into dumpsites.

5.5 Access to Basic Necessities and Essential Services in Waste Picking Areas

5.5.1 Proximity of Essential Services

CPRs often find themselves working in areas where essential services are scarce and far from their work sites. Shops, where CPRs can purchase food and essential items, are often at a considerable distance, making it challenging to access necessities during working hours. Likewise, access to washrooms and hygienic facilities is limited, leading CPRs to resort to unsanitary alternatives during their work shifts.

5.5.2 Challenges in Accessing Basic Necessities and Services

Among the 1059 CPRs surveyed, 288 individuals reported that shops, police stations, and health centers are far from their waste picking sites. This lack of proximity poses considerable challenges, especially during emergencies or when CPRs require immediate assistance.

Furthermore, finding transportation to and from waste picking sites is very difficult, especially in remote areas. CPRs often carry heavy loads of collected scrap for miles to reach their homes or designated selling points, adding to their physical strain and exhaustion.

For CPR families, ensuring their children's access to education can be a challenge, as schools might be distant from their homes or workplaces. The combination of limited transportation options and the need to earn income through waste picking can hinder children's regular attendance in schools.

5.6 Children's Rights to Education in the Context of CPRs

Ensuring children's access to education is essential for their overall development and future prospects. However, CPRs in Fiji face various challenges in ensuring that their children have access to education while working in this profession.

5.6.1 Challenges in Ensuring Children's Access to Education

CPRs often grapple with financial constraints, making it challenging to provide education for their children. The irregular and unpredictable income earned through waste picking may not always be sufficient to cover school fees, textbooks, uniforms, and other educational expenses. As a result, some CPR families find it difficult to ensure consistent school attendance for their children.

Moreover, the nature of waste picking work, which involves long hours and physical labor, can limit parents' ability to be actively involved in their children's education. Balancing the demands of waste picking with supporting their children's educational needs becomes a constant challenge for CPR parents.

5.6.2 Children Facing Discrimination or Stigma

The children of CPRs may face discrimination or stigma from their peers or others in the community due to their parent's profession. Prejudices surrounding waste picking can lead to social exclusion and alienation of these children. They may be subjected to name calling and this negative association can affect their self-esteem and hinder their social interactions and integration within their schools and communities.

5.6.3 Access to Proper Nutrition and Services

CPR families, at times, struggle to provide sufficient food and proper nutrition for their children due to the financial constraints they face. Inadequate nutrition can have adverse effects on children's health, growth, and overall well-being. Access to essential services, such as healthcare and sanitation facilities, may also be limited, posing additional challenges for CPRs in ensuring their children's health and well-being.

5.6.4 Positive Aspects of CPR Parenting

Despite the challenges, CPR parents often exhibit resilience, resourcefulness, and a deep sense of commitment to their children's education. They emphasize the value of education and instill in their children a strong work ethic and determination to overcome obstacles. CPR families can create a supportive and close-knit environment, fostering a sense of solidarity and strength within their community.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"I'm doing this for my daughter"

For the past 22 years, a CPR has been living on the streets, where he navigates a life as both a street bottle collector and a shoeshine boy. Despite the challenges and hardships, he faces daily, he remains driven by his unwavering commitment to providing for his daughter, who currently lives with relatives.

To support his daughter's education and basic needs, he relies on the income earned from selling bottles and shining shoes. The meager earnings he generates through these activities become the lifeline that sustains his daughter's future. However, he struggles each day to make ends meet, battling the harsh realities of street life.

During his nighttime endeavors, he sells the collected bottles to juice sellers in town, making every effort to maximize his earnings. Yet, despite his resilience and resourcefulness, finding other job opportunities remains a constant challenge. His past and living conditions are often held against him, resulting in difficulties in securing stable employment.

The judgment he faces from his family and friends further adds to his burdens. Being labeled as homeless and a street bottle collector takes a toll on his self-esteem and exacerbates the challenges, he encounters in seeking a better life.

In the pursuit of survival, he adopts a dual approach, engaging in bottle collecting at night while shining shoes during the day. These efforts reflect his determination to make the most of every opportunity presented to him.

The man's love for his daughter serves as a driving force, giving him the strength to endure the hardships of street life. Despite the many hurdles he faces, he remains steadfast in his commitment to supporting his daughter's education and future.

5.7 Lack of Social Welfare Support

One of the major challenges faced by CPRs in Fiji is the lack of adequate social welfare support. Social welfare schemes and programs play a vital role in providing financial assistance, healthcare, and other forms of support to individuals and families in need. However, many CPRs report that they have been unable to access these resources, which significantly impacts their quality of life and ability to sustain their livelihoods.

One common issue is the age restriction for certain social welfare schemes, which leaves many CPRs ineligible for support. Another prevalent concern is the insufficiency of the amount provided, which often only lasts for a week, insufficient to cater to the needs of an entire month. This insufficient support contributes to financial instability and hardships among CPRs and their families.

In some cases, CPRs have been denied support due to what may seem like minor reasons, such as the possession of a television set. This highlights a need to reassess eligibility criteria and ensure that they consider the specific circumstances and needs of CPRs. Repeated rejection of social welfare applications and unfulfilled promises of support further underscore the need for a more responsive and inclusive social welfare system.

5.8 Elderly Abuse

Elderly Abuse is another profound challenge faced by CPRs in Fiji. Elderly CPRs often find themselves at the receiving end of this societal bias, with its effects compounding the difficulties they already face due to their profession.

The common societal perception that aging equates to decreased productivity and usefulness can lead to older CPRs being left on the streets to scavenge. This not only poses a threat to their health and safety but also impacts their dignity and self-esteem.

According to the findings, some elderly CPRs have been abandoned by their families, with children migrating and severing ties. The loss of familial support further worsens their vulnerability, leading to an increased sense of isolation. The lack of a strong support system often results in these elderly CPRs facing their challenges alone, leading to an enhanced emotional toll.

There have also been a few cases where elderly CPRs have found themselves homeless due to marital issues or family disputes. For instance, the team met a CPR in a situation where his spouse divorced and took ownership of the property, leaving him to collect recyclables for more than 10 years to support himself.

Addressing ageism requires concerted efforts at multiple levels. Societal attitudes towards aging need to change, and the dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of age, must be recognized. Policymakers need to enact and enforce laws against age discrimination, while social services and welfare programs must ensure they cater to the needs of the elderly, particularly those in vulnerable professions such as waste picking.

Moreover, there's a pressing need for the establishment of support networks for elderly CPRs. This could be in the form of community-based programs that provide emotional support, practical assistance, and avenues for social interaction. The inclusion of mental health services, with a focus on coping mechanisms for dealing with social isolation and stress, can also be invaluable.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"This is how the journey began"

The journey to support the marginalized community began with an encounter that left a lasting impact on our director/CEO. At the time, he was the manager of a scrap yard, where he would cross paths with an old Itaukei lady on a daily basis. Despite their brief interactions, she knew his name and one day, she gathered the courage to stop him.

As they stood face to face, she began to share her heart-wrenching story. The old lady revealed that she had once been a victim of rape, which tragically led her to a life of homelessness. With nowhere else to turn, she found a means of survival by collecting cans and selling them at the scrap yard where our director worked. Despite her hardships, she showed remarkable resilience in the face of adversity.

One day, the old Itaukei lady was no longer seen at the scrap yard. She had passed away on the very streets she had called home, where she had fought to survive each day. In honor of the old lady's memory, her final rites were conducted with great respect, under Indian traditions. She was adorned in a saree, symbolizing the deep impact she had left on the hearts of those around her.

It was this profound encounter that sparked a profound change in our director/CEO's perspective. He realized that there were countless individuals like the old Itaukei lady, struggling on the fringes of society, often unseen and unheard. Determined to make a difference, he resolved to create an organization that would reach out to and uplift marginalized communities, offering them hope, support, and opportunities for a brighter future.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“Selling PET to survive”

This case study is about a retired cane cutter, who dedicated his life to providing for his family. After retiring from his laborious profession, he hoped to spend his years surrounded by his children. However, fate had other plans for him, and his story takes a turn as he navigates the challenges of separation, survival, and the strong spirit that sustains him.

His unwavering commitment to his children's education drove him to make significant sacrifices to ensure they received the best opportunities for a brighter future.

As his children grew older, they were drawn to urban opportunities and gradually migrated to different cities in pursuit of their dreams. While the old man understood their ambitions, the separation took an emotional toll on him.

It has been six years since the old man last spoke with his children. The once close-knit family connection had faded, leaving him feeling isolated and lonely.

In the absence of financial support and family connections, the old man had to find a way to survive. He turned to collecting and selling PET bottles and selling to market vendors as a means of sustenance.

The journey of the old man is one marked by both joy and sorrow. Memories of his children's upbringing and their dreams filled his heart with love and pride.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“When life takes a turn”

This case study is about an old man who was dropped off at an elderly care home, unaware of what was about to unfold. His son had instructed him to wait outside while promising to return shortly. The old man obediently waited outside with hope and anticipation, but the hours ticked by, and his son didn't show up.

As the sun began to set, the old man's confusion turned to worry, yet he clung to the belief that his son would arrive any moment. The compassionate staff at the elderly care home were aware of the situation and tried to console the old man, explaining the possibility that his son might not return as promised. But the old man remained adamant, holding on to the hope that his son would come for him.

After an arduous wait of eight long hours, reality finally struck. The truth he had been avoiding sank in, and with heavy steps, he walked inside the elderly care home and made a call to his son. He asked his son to come to pick him up, to which his son replied reassuringly that he was on his way.

However, the promises proved empty once again, and the old man found himself alone in the unfamiliar environment of the elderly care home. Determined not to lose hope, he found solace in staying productive and active. During the days spent in the care home, he would collect cans. The old man sold the collected cans to Waste Recyclers Fiji Ltd (WRFL), earning a little money and contributing to waste management.

The day came, and he breathed his last breath. At his funeral, his family was nowhere to be found. The rituals of his passing were performed by the caring staff of the elderly care home, who felt a deep connection with him and regarded him as their own.



Interviewer conducting an interview with an elderly CPR sitting on the footpath.
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

5.9 Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a distressing challenge faced by some CPRs, affecting their physical and emotional well-being. In certain cases, CPRs, particularly women, encounter domestic abuse within their households, intensifying the difficulties they already face in their profession.

It was noted that some CPR women faced financial control from their partners, who prevent them from earning through waste picking. This restriction of economic freedom hinders their ability to improve their livelihoods. In some households, spouses were not supportive of waste picking as a profession, leading to conflicts and strained relationships.

The stresses of waste picking, including exposure to hazardous waste, low income, and social stigma, may also contribute to tension within households, leading to abusive behavior by some partners who use violence as an outlet for their frustrations.

Domestic violence within the CPR households can have detrimental effects on children witnessing or experiencing violence themselves. It can lead to a cycle of trauma and perpetuate intergenerational challenges. CPRs who experience domestic violence may suffer from anxiety, depression, and trauma, affecting their overall well-being and ability to cope with the demands of waste picking. Some CPRs may live in fear due to abusive relationships, leading them to withdraw from social interactions and support networks.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"Tragedy, financial struggles, and domestic abuse"

This case study is about a woman who has faced numerous challenges in her journey as a CPR. She is a devoted mother of three, residing with her partner's family in a modest lean-to house on the outskirts of the Western Division. With limited education opportunities, she could not secure formal employment, as she had only completed up to class 6 in her schooling years. The struggle to find a job led her to embrace waste picking as an alternative means to support her family.

For the past seven years, she has been collecting recyclables along the roadside and in the town area, often accompanied by her young children, all below the age of five. The determination to make ends meet drives her daily, as she braves the streets with her little ones to collect cans, PET bottles, and scrap metals.

However, her journey has not been without heartache. Tragically, last year, her 3-year-old son was involved in a devastating accident, being struck by a police vehicle while crossing the road after collecting recyclables. The emotional trauma and financial burden of this tragedy have left her family struggling to cope.

Despite reaching out to various agencies, she has encountered non-responsiveness, leaving her feeling isolated and unheard. Additionally, her request for a medical report on her son's condition from a doctor at a hospital went unanswered, adding to her distress.

During the interview, concerning revelations came to light. She and her children are victims of physical and verbal abuse by her husband. He channels his frustration over their meager earnings from recyclable sales towards her and the children, subjecting them to pain and suffering. Despite seeking help from her own family, their advice is to return to him, as he is the father of her children, leaving her with a heart-wrenching dilemma.

Her unwavering love for her children and her desire to protect her partner from legal consequences prevent her from reporting the abuse, even as she endures the pain inflicted upon her family.

This courageous mother illustrates the strength and determination it takes to survive in the face of adversity. Despite the hardships and challenges that life has thrown her way, she remains steadfast in her commitment to providing for her children, embracing waste picking to support them.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"A resilient single mother"

This case study is of a single parent in the Western Division, who is trapped in an abusive and toxic relationship. Despite her struggles, she continues to support her nuclear family through waste picking, showing remarkable strength and resilience.

Having faced abuse from her partner, she made the brave decision to leave him and find safety with her family. However, fear still lingers, as she is concerned about her partner's potential return and the threat it poses to her and her child. This constant state of fear further adds to her emotional burden, making it challenging for her to find peace and security.

Seeking legal assistance, she went to court to start the process of divorce, hoping to break free from her abusive partner. However, her attempts for legal help were met with disappointment as the court did not provide the necessary support or updates on the proceedings, leaving her feeling abandoned and unheard.

Adding to her struggles, her husband's destructive habits of drug use and dealing exacerbate the financial strain on the family. He takes the land lease allowances meant to support the family and squanders it on alcohol and drugs, leaving them with little to survive on. This selfish behavior highlights his lack of concern for their well-being, further deepening the hardship they face.

In the midst of such adversity, the woman's determination to provide for her family through waste picking is commendable. Despite the challenges, she continues to work tirelessly to earn a living for herself and her child, displaying immense love and dedication as a single parent.

This story underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive support system for individuals facing domestic abuse and financial struggles. Access to legal assistance and protection is crucial to help victims break free from abusive relationships and find safety. Moreover, interventions are needed to address substance abuse issues and ensure the well-being of families affected by such destructive behaviors.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"Financial hardship and domestic abuse"

This is a case study of a woman who faces both financial hardship and domestic abuse while working as a CPR. Her determination to provide for herself and her children in the face of adversity is truly commendable, but it is disheartening to learn about the challenges she endures within her own family.

She turns to waste picking to earn money after realizing that her husband does not provide her with the financial support she needs. Struggling to make ends meet, she seeks independence and a way to meet her basic needs, as well as those of her children. The dumpsite becomes her refuge, where she collects recyclables to sell and earn a meager income.

However, her husband's behavior casts a dark shadow over her life. He takes the cash she earns, creating financial strain and disagreements that escalate into physical abuse. This cycle of abuse perpetuates the hardships she faces daily, making it even more challenging for her to provide for her family.

Moreover, the emotional toll is exacerbated as her husband belittles and demeans her for her work as a CPR. The lack of respect and understanding from her partner adds to her burden, making her struggle even more daunting.

Despite the adversity she faces both within her family and as a CPR, this woman shows incredible strength and determination. Her courage to work hard, despite the abuse and criticism, reflects her deep love and commitment to ensuring a better life for her children.

5.10 Prostitution

Prostitution is an unfortunate reality faced by some CPRs, particularly among vulnerable groups like the LGBTQI+ community. The intersection of poverty, social marginalization, and limited economic opportunities can push some CPRs into engaging in sex work as a means of survival. Here are some important points to consider regarding prostitution among CPRs:

CPRs who resort to prostitution often do so due to extreme poverty and limited access to alternative livelihood options. They become vulnerable to exploitation by clients and pimps, making it challenging to break free from the cycle of sex work.

During the mapping exercise, the team visited a haven for sex workers from the LGBTQI+ community who are also involved in waste picking. These individuals have adopted dual livelihoods, engaging in prostitution during certain days of the week and collecting scrap on other days. This pattern highlights the complexities of their lives and the need for comprehensive support.

5.11 Collection Fees

Collection fees are a significant concern for CPRs in Fiji, especially when accessing dumpsites. To enter the dumpsite, CPRs are required to show a receipt, and the monthly fee varies based on the type of waste they collect. Those collecting only food waste are charged \$12.30, while those collecting both food and scrap face a higher fee of \$24.65. However, the fee system can lead to losses for CPRs, particularly if they are unable to collect enough food waste during their work hours to justify the higher fee. Additionally, some councils charge even higher fees, such as \$20 per month, adding to the financial burden faced by CPRs. These collection fees can significantly impact the livelihoods of CPRs and call for a more balanced and fair approach that considers their income and economic circumstances.

There are still certain limitations imposed on CPRs receiving Social Welfare. They are not allowed to access the dumpsite, further restricting their means of livelihood and independence.

Notably, most councils were forthcoming. Some councils, like Labasa and Lautoka, have opted not to impose such charges on CPRs. In the case of Lautoka Town Council, PRF engaged in negotiations with the council to alleviate the dumpsite entry fee, ultimately advocating for a more sustainable and supportive environment for the CPR community.

Chapter 6: Summary of Findings per Town/city

The summary of findings across various towns and cities provides a glimpse into the vibrant dynamics of waste picking in Fiji. Through this mapping exercise, diverse challenges and living conditions have been unveiled, shedding light on the lives of those engaged in this vital yet often marginalized profession. From the bustling streets of urban centers to the close-knit communities in remote areas, the data paints a picture of the waste pickers' struggles, resilience, and unique experiences. These insights serve as a foundation for targeted interventions and policies to uplift waste pickers and enhance their well-being, while also fostering a deeper understanding of their indispensable role in shaping the nation's waste management landscape.

6.1 Rakiraki

The mapping team began the exercise in Rakiraki, arriving a day earlier than scheduled. The team headed directly to the Rakiraki dumpsite, where a van was spotted collecting scrap amidst the piles of discarded waste. Setting up tents, the team engaged with these scrap collectors to get an overview of the ways they operate.

House-to-house visits and market area interactions yielded valuable insights about CPRs in Rakiraki. Despite the dumpsite closing its gates after 5pm, many CPRs found alternative access points through fence openings, enabling them to continue collecting recyclables late into the night.

During their interactions, the team learned that some CPRs who were suffering from infections or illnesses believed these health issues were caused by black magic, rather than considering the hazardous conditions of the dumpsite where they worked regularly.

On the second day, a troubling incident occurred when the dumpsite caught fire, and it was suspected to be an intentional act by a CPR scavenging for scrap metal under heaps of trash. Despite this difficult situation, the team persevered, continuing the mapping exercise on the third day before moving on to other areas.

In Rakiraki, 36 male and 14 female CPRs were recorded, totaling 50 individuals engaged in waste picking activities.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"I started going to the dump at the age of 13"

A 24-year-old has emerged as a beacon of change in his community through his remarkable journey as a CPR. Born and raised in Rakiraki, he experienced financial hardships and societal stigmas associated with waste picking. However, rather than succumbing to the hardships, he turned his experiences into a catalyst for positive transformation.

Growing up, he accompanied his grandfather to the local dumpsite. He often received disheartening comments and was labeled as "malich," which means filthy. Despite the challenges, he remained determined to make a difference. He pursued vocational education in automotive engineering while simultaneously working as a CPR, using the income to support his family and fund his studies.

His journey as a CPR gained renewed significance during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic when he lost his job. He firmly believes in the importance of strict littering regulations and the need for waste sorting before disposal.

Through his remarkable journey, he has proven that change starts at the grassroots level. His story serves as an inspiration for others, reminding us that one person can make a significant impact for generations to come.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

"I pursued a degree to be a role model for my children"

A CPR from Rakiraki is turning plastic bottles into an opportunity. As a door-to-door waste collector, she collects PET bottles and utilizes them to sell nutritious fruit juice. In addition to her juice business, she also sells vegetables at the local market. Her journey as a waste collector and entrepreneur is driven by her determination to support her family financially while promoting sustainability.

Initially, she started her entrepreneurial venture as a market vendor when she couldn't find a job, but she felt embarrassed due to societal perceptions. However, fueled by her passion for education and the desire to set an example for her children, she pursued a bachelor's degree in education. Despite her initial reservations, she soon realized that her work was appreciated by people who valued the healthy fruit juice options she provided.

While conducting business at the market, she occasionally encounters drunkards, which poses a challenge for her. However, she remains resilient and focused on her mission to contribute positively to her community. These encounters have taught her to handle such situations with caution and rely on her strong interpersonal skills to ensure her safety and maintain the smooth operation of her business.

Although she works diligently to support her family, she sometimes struggles to fulfill her children's wants, such as providing a smartphone. Nevertheless, she remains determined to provide her children with a bright future and meets their essential needs to the best of her abilities.

6.2 Tavua

In Tavua, the mapping team encountered CPRs who faced severe marginalization and lived in poor conditions. One particularly distressing sight was a mother and her son living in a house without a proper floor; instead, they had to make do with the soil covered with cartons as their living space. Despite their challenging circumstances, the lady displayed tremendous hospitality, preparing boiled corn for the team during their visit.

The gender distribution among the CPRs in this area was as follows with 7 males and 3 females.

6.3 Ba

In Ba, the mapping exercise commenced at the dumpsite. One prevalent challenge faced by the CPRs in this area was the lack of access to proper washroom and sanitation facilities. They had to resort to going to high mountains during lunchtime and using the bushes as makeshift washrooms, highlighting the dire need for better facilities.

Despite the tough conditions, the CPRs in Ba had support from their municipal council. This positive collaboration allowed the team to gain valuable insights into the CPRs' experiences and living conditions. For many CPRs, the dumpsite served as a one-stop-shop for expired and rejected food products, contributing to their sustenance in challenging circumstances.

Transportation emerged as another significant issue for CPRs in Ba. Many of them had to travel long distances to reach the dumpsite, and some expressed the need for better access to buses that could ease their travel.

The team extended their survey to Maururu settlement, which also had CPRs working in the dumpsite.

In Ba, a larger and more diverse CPR community was observed, with 46 males and 74 females, bringing the total to 120 CPRs.



The mapping team having a dialogue session with CPRs in Ba.
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“Life after Cyclone Windston was tough”

This case study is about a CPR who has been an integral part of the recycling community for over two decades. Throughout his life, he has found solace in collecting and selling recyclables, recognizing the inherent value in this work. For him, the dumpsite is similar to a Gold Mine, a place filled with opportunities to turn discarded items into a means of livelihood.

In 2016, when Cyclone Winston struck Fiji, he and his family faced a devastating blow. They lost their home, which was in a squatter settlement. With the land being government property, they were forced to vacate. The absence of a roof over their heads posed the greatest challenge, especially with his responsibility to care for his family. Therefore, his two oldest children had to drop out of school.

Amidst the turmoil, NGOs stepped in, extending a helping hand to rebuild their home and restart their lives. Grateful for the support, his family rallied together and decided to capitalize on their collective talents.

United in their determination, the entire family began going to the dumpsite to collect recyclables. They saved the earnings from their efforts and invested in a sewing machine for his wife, who had a passion for sewing clothes. Over the years, she honed her skills, and, three years ago, they secured a space in town for her sewing business.

He has become an example of resilience and hard work. In addition to his recycling activities, he also drives a taxi on certain days and works as a night security officer. Balancing multiple roles, he ensures that his family's needs are met, and their future is secure.

Despite facing criticism from society, he takes great pride in his role as a CPR. He remains grateful to Waste Recyclers Fiji Ltd (WRFL) for the support they provided during the tough times. He perseveres, knowing that his work contributes not only to his family's well-being but also to environmental sustainability.

6.4 Lautoka

Similar to Ba, Lautoka had a larger and more dynamic community of CPRs scattered throughout the city. During the mapping, the team had an interesting encounter with a bottle dealer who had to drop his relatives off at Nadi Airport. The interview took place in the airport carpark, drawing attention from onlookers passing by.

However, a distressing incident occurred during the mapping exercise as the dumpsite in Vunato caught fire, causing significant smoke, and creating hazards in the surrounding area. In response to this incident, the Ministry of Health issued a warning, advising people to stay away from the Vunato area to avoid exposure to smoke and potential health risks. In the aftermath of the incident, the CEO of Lautoka City Council announced plans to install CCTV cameras at the dumpsite. This measure aimed to enhance surveillance and monitoring to prevent such incidents in the future and ensure the safety of CPRs and the community at large. Despite the challenging situation, the team continued their efforts to map the CPRs, navigating through the smoke-filled city to collect valuable data.

In Lautoka, the CPR population was even more significant, comprising 138 males, 94 females, and 11 from the LGBTQI+ community, totaling 243 individuals.



The smoke from the dumpsite covering parts of Lautoka.
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“Overcoming an injury and embracing the role of a CPR”

A mother of six, who has chosen a unique path in waste collection and recycling. In the past, she used to collect scraps from the dumpsite. However, due to the weight and physical strain of carrying scrap metal from the dumpsite to her home, she made the difficult decision to discontinue this practice five years ago. Undeterred, she found a new way to contribute to waste recycling and sustainability.

Driven by her resourcefulness and entrepreneurial spirit, she started collecting discarded materials and clothes from the textile and clothing industries at the dumpsite. With the support of her husband, they invested in a sewing machine, and she began her own sewing business. From the materials and clothing she salvages, she skillfully creates various products such as pillowcases, beddings, clothes, and door mats. These unique items find their way to the Lautoka market and are also sold door-to-door by her and her family. Through this initiative, she not only supports her family but also actively contributes to waste reduction and upcycling.

Her sewing business has become a source of pride and sustenance for her family, generating an income of approximately \$100-\$150 per week. Embracing the roles of both a dedicated mother and an accomplished entrepreneur, she lives her passion of being a stay-at-home mom while ensuring financial independence for her family.

The decision to become a CPR has proven to be a fulfilling one for her. It allows her to find value in what others may perceive as waste, transforming discarded materials into functional and beautiful products. In doing so, she not only secures a livelihood for her family but also contributes to the well-being of the environment by promoting recycling and reducing waste.

6.5 Nadi

During the mapping exercise in Nadi, it was observed that, unlike other areas, Nadi does not have dumpsites for CPRs to scavenge through. Despite this, Nadi still has a significant number of individuals involved in waste collection, like Lautoka, with a vibrant and diverse community of CPRs spread across the town.

Nadi stood out as the cleanest area among all the places visited during the mapping exercise. This observation may be attributed to better waste management practices or higher public awareness about keeping the town clean.

The Nadi Town Council has invested in a compactor machine aimed at reducing waste management costs in the area. The compactor is intended to streamline waste management operations and optimize waste disposal processes. Such investments in waste management infrastructure could have positive implications for CPRs and the broader community by potentially improving waste disposal practices and creating safer working conditions.

In Nadi, 32 males and 28 females were identified as CPRs, making a total of 60 individuals.

6.6 Sigatoka

In Sigatoka, CPRs encounter various challenges while waste picking. One of the significant issues they face is the lack of access to washroom facilities, which poses a considerable inconvenience during their work hours.

Access to the dumpsite is strictly regulated, with CPRs required to present identification to enter. After 5pm, anyone found at the dumpsite is reported to the police, adding to the stress and vulnerability felt by the CPRs.

In Sigatoka, 27 males and 6 females were recorded, amounting to 33 CPRs.

6.7 Savusavu

On the day the mapping team arrived in Savusavu to conduct its exercise, the dumpsite was coincidentally on fire, similar to incidents observed in Rakiraki town and Lautoka City. Despite these challenges, the team proceeded to the dumpsite, where they encountered a man who had made the dumpsite his home for over three years. He had constructed a makeshift shelter using materials salvaged from the dumpsite and relied on a nearby polluted mangrove swamp for bathing and drinking water.

This individual had been removed from the dumpsite by the police on several occasions at the Savusavu Town Council's advice and taken to doctors for health checks. However, he consistently returned to the dumpsite, as the council and relevant authorities appeared to have left him unattended. The CEO of the Savusavu Town Council confirmed during a meeting with the team that the dumpsite did not belong to the council but was owned by the Ministry of Lands Department. Efforts were underway to relocate the dumpsite to a more suitable location.

Amidst their mapping exercise, participants shared experiences of stigma, name-calling, abuse, and harassment from other public servants, particularly the police force. These negative encounters embarrassed the CPRs, discouraging them from carrying out their essential work as garbage collectors, dump truck drivers, grass cutters, and bottle collectors.

In Savusavu, there were 42 males, 19 females, and 1 from the LGBTQI+ community, totaling 62 CPRs.



The mapping team meeting Savusavu Town Council.
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

6.8 Labasa

Labasa Town Council staff with the guidance of Special Administrator, Mrs. Robinson, have created a very welcoming and warm environment for the women CPRs who collect recyclables from the dumpsite.

The vibrant culture is very apparent from the responses of the CPRs who are not only passionate about their work but also share a sense of responsibility towards the dumpsite. The women CPRs are all called by their names so that the council workers “know” who they are. The municipal council registers the CPR, allows them to use the washroom and water facilities, provides them with PPEs, and does not charge them any fees at all.

The CPRs in Labasa were shocked that other municipal councils in Fiji treat their CPRs with a very cold attitude by charging them fees and not allowing them to use water or washroom facilities. They expressed that they feel genuinely appreciated and senior management at the council often show gratitude towards their work.

Mrs. Robinson said the Council recognized the critical work CPRs do in ensuring that recyclables are retrieved from the dumpsite and the environment. She also said that appreciating the work of the CPRs has been part of the council's culture and they are extremely proud of the women CPRs. She also acknowledged PRFs efforts in empowering the CPR community which also has influenced them to take the work done this marginalized community much more seriously.

In Labasa, the community of CPRs included 60 males and 69 females, bringing the total to 129 individuals.



The mapping team meeting Labasa Town Council and the CPRs in Labasa.

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

6.9 Suva

In Suva, the capital city of Fiji, waste management practices differ from other areas as it has a landfill facility located in Naboro, where waste is disposed of and managed in an organized manner. Unlike dumpsites found in some regions, Suva does not have such informal waste disposal sites.

During the mapping exercise, Suva stood out with the largest number of CPRs recorded among all the areas surveyed. The waste picking community in Suva is extensive and dynamic, with a significant number of individuals engaged in this essential occupation. CPRs can be found scattered all over the city, diligently collecting recyclables and valuable materials.

In terms of gender distribution, the CPRs in Suva exhibited the following breakdown with 149 males, 118 females, and 5 individuals identified from the LGBTQI+ community.

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“Overcoming Challenges”

In his late 50s, a man dedicates himself to collecting bottles daily to support his extended family. However, he faces judgment and mistreatment from his own relatives, despite his selfless contributions to the household. Despite being mentally slow, he communicates well and diligently uses every penny he earns from bottle collecting to buy food for the family. Picking bottles every day not only sustains him financially but also helps him stay healthy and fit.

Despite his commitment to providing for his family, he encounters harassment from a street dweller every time he walks past, solely because of the work he does as a street bottle collector. Despite the challenges and discrimination, he faces, he remains resilient, knowing that his efforts make a difference in the lives of those he cares for.

6.10 Nausori and Nasinu

In the areas of Nausori and Nasinu, similar to Suva, there are no official dumpsites for waste disposal. Instead, these regions face the challenge of illegal dumping of rubbish, which has become a cause for concern for the local authorities and communities.

The absence of designated dumpsites in Nausori and Nasinu creates a pressing issue as some individuals resort to improper waste disposal methods, such as illegal dumping. This practice not only poses environmental hazards but also affects the overall cleanliness and aesthetics of the areas.

Efforts to curb illegal dumping and promote responsible waste management are crucial to maintaining a clean and healthy environment for the residents of Nausori and Nasinu. The local authorities need to address this issue promptly by implementing proper waste management strategies, raising awareness about the consequences of illegal dumping, and encouraging community involvement in waste reduction and recycling initiatives. With collective action and responsible waste disposal practices, Nausori and Nasinu can strive towards a cleaner and more sustainable future.

In Nausori and Nasinu, the number of CPRs stood at 33 males and 47 females, making a total of 80 individuals.⁷

SPOTLIGHT STORY

“Retired Civil Servant Turns PET Bottles into Sustainable Success”

A retired Civil Servant who, in his post-retirement phase, has decided to venture into the world of entrepreneurship. During his leisure time, he noticed an abundance of PET bottles scattered around his home and his neighbors' yards in Nausori. The realization struck him that these seemingly discarded bottles held untapped potential for earning extra cash.

Motivated by this opportunity, he began a quest to collect these PET bottles from his neighbors, visiting them 2-3 times a week to gather these recyclables and ensure they didn't go to waste. Beyond the aim of cleaning up the neighborhood, he viewed this endeavor as a chance to make a positive impact on the environment by promoting recycling.

Inspired by the collection of PET bottles, he decided to launch a juice business. Driven by a passion for healthy beverages and a desire for sustainable income, he started selling freshly prepared juices in the bustling town of Nausori.

The juice business presented a unique challenge, as the Town Council workers were also collecting PET bottles during their rubbish collection days. These workers offered the bottles to local juice sellers for a fee of \$5 per bag full, creating competition for him. However, this challenge only served to motivate him further to differentiate his product and offer something special to his customers.

His juice business quickly gained popularity, attracting a loyal customer base with refreshing and flavorful blends of fruits and vegetables. His dedication to using freshly collected PET bottles for packaging not only made his juices eco-friendly but also resonated with environmentally conscious consumers.

As the business thrived, he found joy not only in his entrepreneurial success but also in contributing to waste reduction and promoting recycling. His initiative transformed discarded bottles into a viable business opportunity and sparked environmental awareness in the community.

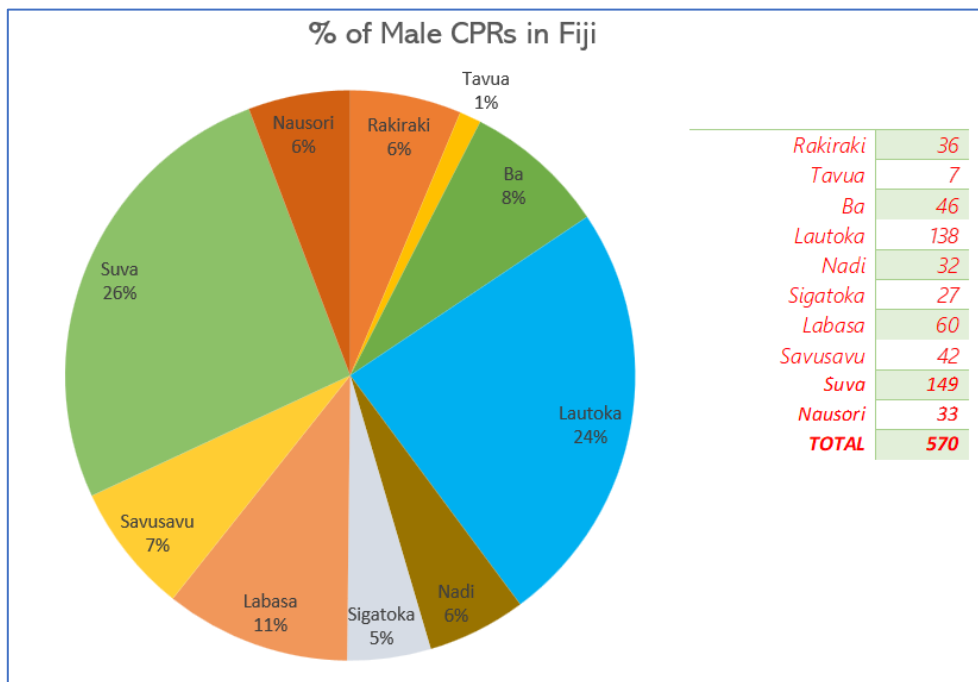
By using the PET bottles collected from his neighbors, he exemplified the concept of community support and collaboration. He helped his neighbors dispose of their recyclables responsibly, fostering a sense of camaraderie among them through this collective effort.

In his retirement years, he embraced a purposeful and passionate path with the juice business. He demonstrated that age posed no barrier to initiating a venture and making a meaningful impact in the community.

⁷ The data in these areas are subjected to limitations due to the informal nature of CPR operations, along with challenges like poor networking and awareness. As a result, this might have impacted the accuracy of the information gathered.

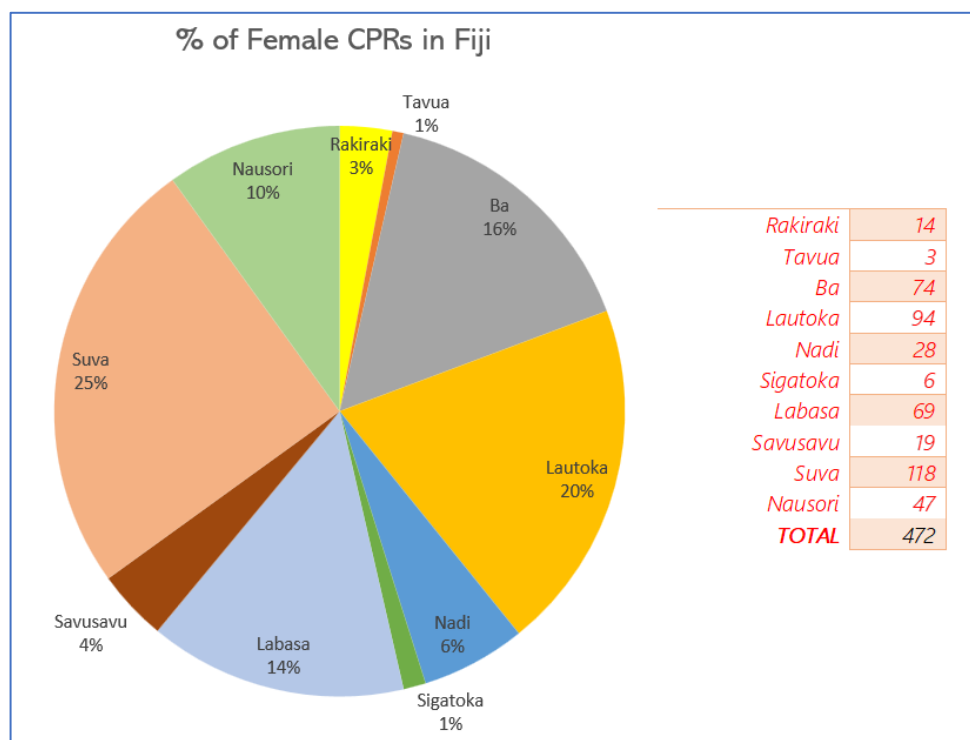
6.11 Summary of Male CPRs in Fiji

From the data provided collected from the mapping exercise, below is a summary of the number of male CPRs (CPRs) in different areas of Fiji:



6.12 Summary of Female CPRs in Fiji

From the data provided collected from the mapping exercise, below is a summary of the number of female CPRs in different areas of Fiji:



6.13 Summary of CPRs from the LGBTQI+ Community

In Rakiraki, Tavua, Ba, Nadi, Sigatoka, and Nausori, there were no CPRs who identified themselves from the LGBTQI+ community. However, in Lautoka, there were 11 CPRs who fall under this category. In Suva, five individuals identified themselves as members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Overall, across all areas, a total of 17 CPRs identified with gender identities beyond the male and female classifications, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and recognizing diverse gender expressions in waste picking communities.

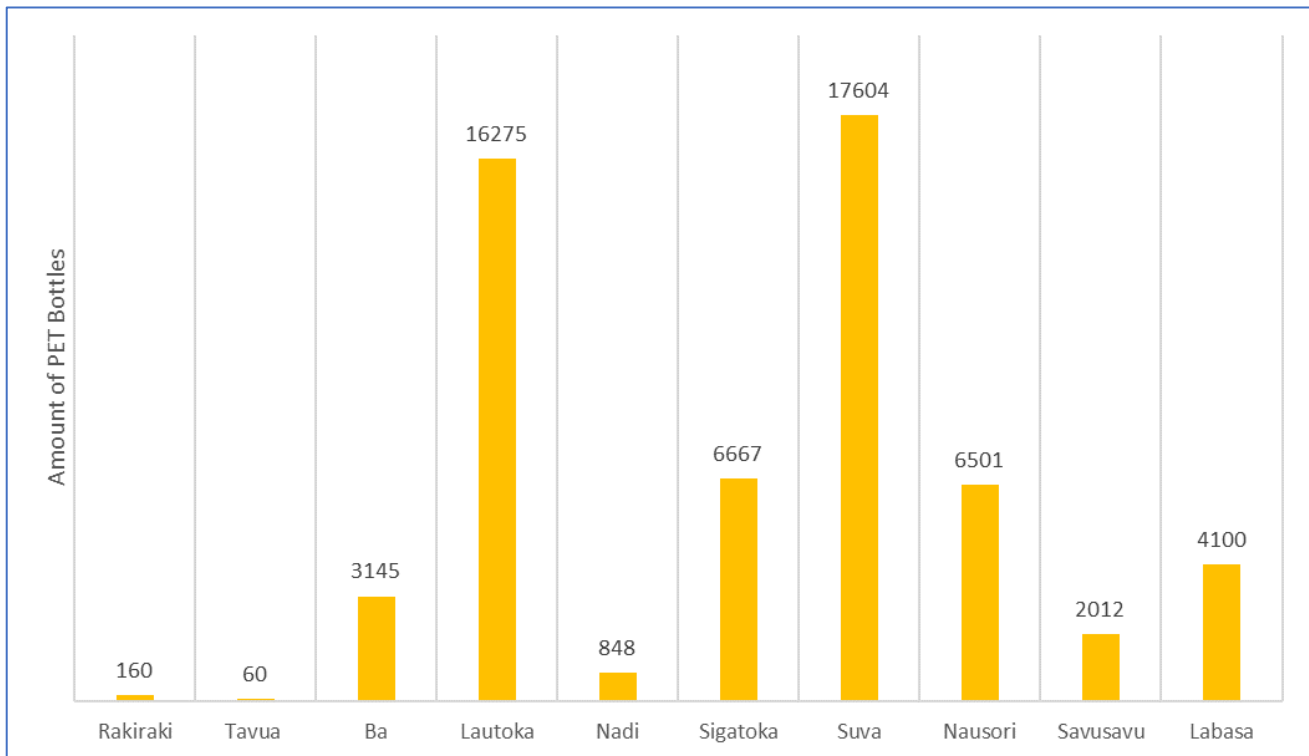
6.14 PET Bottles

In Fiji, PET bottles are commonly used for packaging beverages, water, and other consumer products. However, the widespread use of PET bottles also leads to significant plastic waste, which poses environmental challenges. These bottles are either sold to juice sellers in markets or sold back to beverage distributors.

In the town of Rakiraki, the total units of PET collected weekly are estimated to be 160 bottles while in Tavua, this number reaches 60 bottles. The city of Ba records 3,145 PET bottles collected weekly and in Lautoka, the CPRs can successfully collect 16,275 PET bottles weekly, reflecting their dedication to keeping the city clean and environmentally friendly.

Moving to the capital city, Suva, an astounding 17,604 PET bottles are collected weekly, reflecting the city's higher population and greater consumption of bottled products. CPRs in Nausori and Savusavu also contribute significantly, with 6,501 and 2,012 PET bottles collected weekly, respectively. In Labasa, 4,100 PET bottles are collected weekly. In total, CPRs across Fiji collect a staggering 57,372 PET bottles every week. Over the course of a year, this amounts to approximately 44,750.16kg of PET bottles per annum.

Estimated Volume of PET bottles Generated Weekly per Area (units)



6.15 Glass Bottles

Glass bottles, another significant component of consumer waste, are also collected in considerable numbers by diligent CPRs across Fiji. In Rakiraki, an estimated sum of 300 glass bottles are picked weekly. The numbers are a bit less in Tavua, with an average of 52 bottles collected each week. Ba records a weekly collection of around 250 glass bottles.

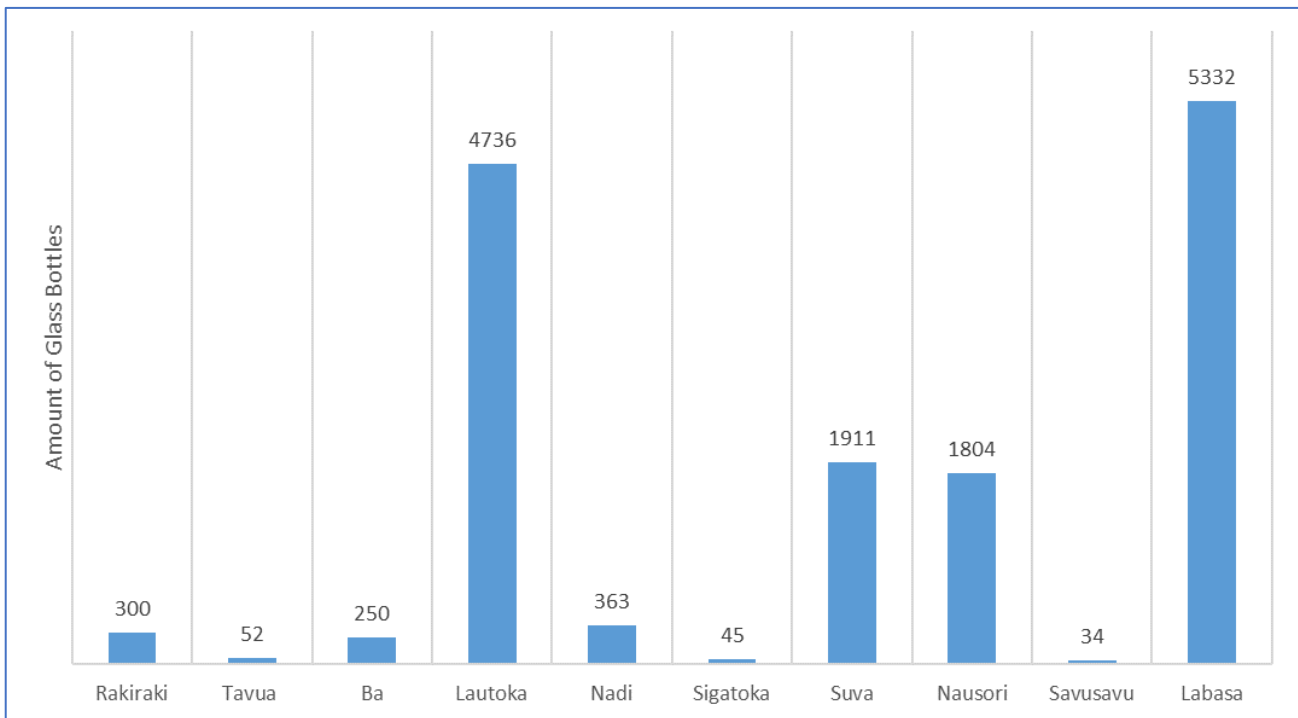
In Lautoka, a city with a larger population, the CPRs efforts are reflected in the collection of around 4,736 glass bottles every week. Moving to Nadi, around 363 bottles are gathered weekly.

Sigatoka sees a relatively smaller number of 45 glass bottles collected weekly, indicative of fewer CPRs active in the area. In contrast, Suva and Nausori report substantial collections of 1,911 and 1,804 glass bottles respectively every week.

Savusavu records a smaller figure with 34 bottles collected weekly, while Labasa sees an impressive collection of 5,332 glass bottles every week.

In total, these efforts result in around 14,827 glass bottles being collected each week across Fiji. Over the course of a year, this amounts to approximately 462,602.40kg of glass bottles per annum.

Estimated Volume of Glass bottles Generated Weekly per Area (units)



6.16 Scrap Metal

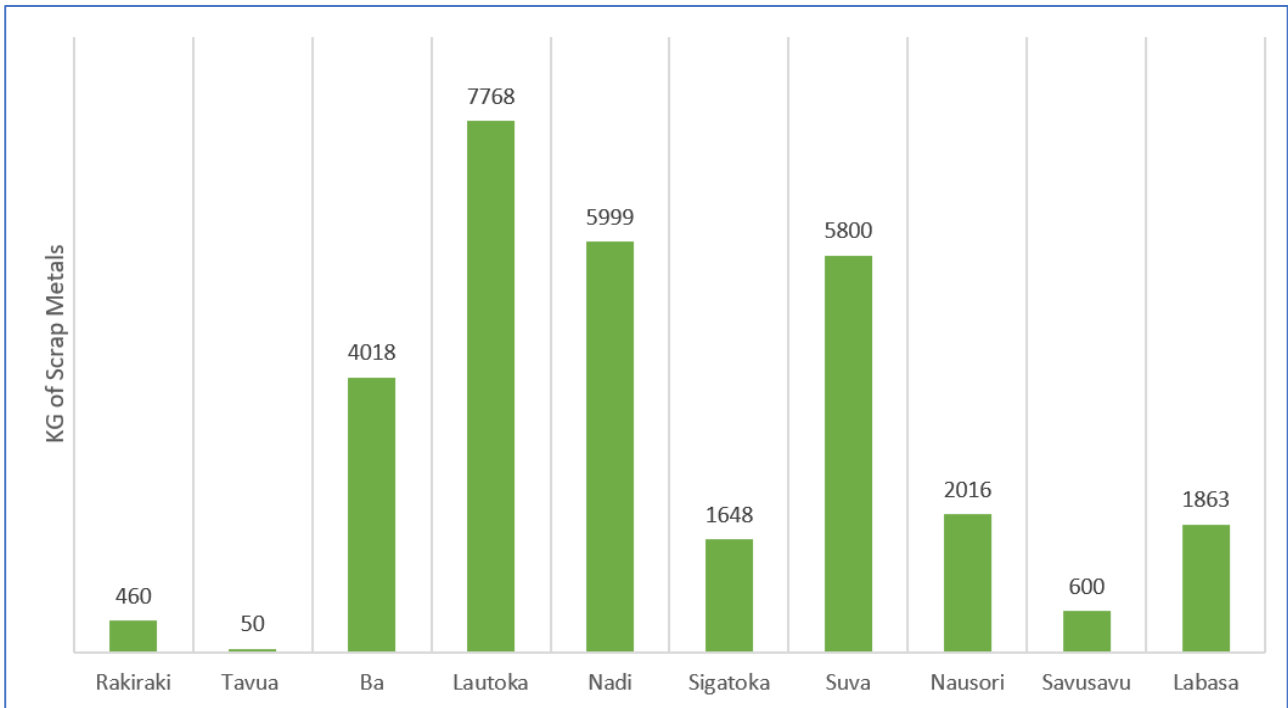
Scrap metal, a valuable recyclable material, is a significant component of the waste collected by hardworking CPRs across various regions in Fiji. In Rakiraki, an average of 460 kilograms of scrap metal is collected weekly, showcasing the dedication of CPRs in this area. Tavua records a slightly lower figure, with around 50 kg of scrap metal collected every week.

The bustling city of Ba reports an impressive weekly collection of approximately 4,018 kilograms of scrap metal, indicating the active waste picking community and the abundance of recyclable material in the region. In Lautoka, the industrious efforts of the CPRs result in the collection of a remarkable 7,768 kilograms of scrap metal every week.

In Nadi, CPRs contribute to the collection of around 5,999 kilograms of scrap metal weekly, further highlighting their crucial role in managing and recycling valuable materials. Moving to Sigatoka, an average of 1,648 kilograms of scrap metal is collected weekly by dedicated CPRs.

In Suva, the capital city of Fiji, CPRs play a vital role in the collection of approximately 5,800 kilograms of scrap metal every week. Nausori follows closely behind, with around 2,016 kilograms of scrap metal collected weekly.

Estimated Volume of Scrap Metal Generated Weekly per Area (kg)



The efforts of CPRs in smaller regions like Savusavu are equally commendable, contributing to the collection of 600 kilograms of scrap metal weekly. Labasa, another town known for its proactive CPRs, records a collection of approximately 1,863 kilograms of scrap metal every week.

Overall, the collective dedication of CPRs from various regions results in the remarkable collection of around 30,222 kilograms of scrap metal every week.

6.17 Summary on Recyclables

Area	PET Bottles (Units)	Scrap Metal (Kg)	Glass Bottles (Units)
Rakiraki	160	460	300
Tavua	60	50	52
Ba	3145	4018	250
Lautoka	16275	7768	4736
Nadi	848	5999	363
Sigatoka	6667	1648	45
Suva	17604	5800	1911
Nausori	6501	2016	1804
Savusavu	2012	600	34
Labasa	4100	1863	5332
Weekly Total	57372 units	30222kg	14827 units
Total annual	2983344 units	1571544kg	771004 units
To kg	44750.16kg	1571544kg	462602.4kg
To Tonnes	44.75 ton	1571.54 ton	462.60 ton

6.17.1 Economic Contributions from Different Types of Waste

The economic contributions of CPRs in Fiji extend across multiple streams, reflecting their significant role in resource recovery and recycling. Through their dedicated efforts, CPRs make a substantial impact on the local economy by collecting recyclables like glass bottles, PET bottles, and scrap metal. Their consistent weekly and annual collection rates highlight their dedication and collective contribution to environmental sustainability and waste management. Waste picking, not only supports CPRs in their livelihoods but also contribute to the broader recycling ecosystem, fostering a more circular and responsible approach to waste management.

6.18 Summary of Findings on Secondary Employment for CPRs

Apart from waste picking, most CPRs in Fiji are engaged in other forms of employment to supplement their income and livelihoods. Some work in agriculture as cane cutters or poultry farmers, utilizing the country's agricultural resources. Others take on domestic roles as house girls, while some explore entrepreneurship as juice sellers or market vendors. Street-based occupations like wheelbarrow boys offer opportunities for transportation services. CPRs with specialized skills find work as taxi drivers, carpenters, or even club bouncers. These alternative employment options not only provide additional income but also enable CPRs to actively contribute to Fiji's socio-economic fabric.

Chapter 7: Roles and Responsibilities

7.1 Role of Civil Society Organization

7.1.1 Advocacy and Awareness Raising

The Pacific Recycling Foundation stands at the forefront of advocating for CPR rights and interests in Fiji. Through strategic advocacy efforts, PRF engages with policymakers, local authorities, and stakeholders to influence policies and regulations that directly impact CPRs' lives. By addressing issues such as access to waste sites, recognition of their contributions to waste management, and improvement of working conditions, PRF aims to create a more supportive environment for CPRs.

PRF's dedication to advocacy was exemplified through the budgetary submission, where they targeted behavioral change to create a more sustainable waste management system. PRF strives to influence policy decisions that prioritize CPR welfare and environmental preservation. This budgetary submission serves as a powerful advocacy tool, urging decision-makers to consider contributions from the waste picking community and their rights in national planning and resource allocation.

Recognizing the need for greater awareness on waste management, PRF also conducted an awareness roadside campaign. Their collaboration with concerned citizens and environmental groups in the roadside campaign further amplified the message of responsible waste management practices. These grassroots efforts engage communities and empower individuals to act towards waste reduction, recycling, and supporting CPRs. The initiatives showcase PRF's commitment to involving the public in the pursuit of a cleaner and greener Fiji. PRF's dedication to fostering sustainable waste management practices extends to the educational sector as well.

PRF's dedication to raising awareness about the vital role of CPRs in sustainable waste management is evident in their programs. By conducting workshops, and campaigns, they work diligently to dispel the stigma and misconceptions surrounding CPRs. These efforts foster a sense of empathy and appreciation within society, encouraging communities to recognize CPRs as integral contributors to a cleaner and healthier environment.



Awareness campaign organized by PRF.

(Photo Credit: Vivid Media)

7.1.2 Collaboration and Partnership

One notable collaboration that reflects PRF's commitment to sustainability is its partnership with Tourism Fiji. By teaming up with the tourism sector, PRF endeavors to promote responsible waste management practices and environmental conservation. This alliance showcases how CSOs like PRF can leverage diverse partnerships to create a more significant impact, uniting various sectors in a shared vision of a greener and more sustainable Fiji.

Through partnerships with commercial and educational institutions PRF has established the "I Recycle Hub," aiming to instill environmentally conscious habits among students and faculty. This hub serves as a beacon of inspiration, encouraging young minds to take an active role in waste reduction, recycling, and environmental preservation.

PRF's engagement with regional and international organizations have also further highlighted their dedication to advocating for CPR rights on broader platforms. Collaborating with like-minded entities, PRF seeks to achieve systemic change that benefits CPRs and enhances their socio-economic well-being.



PRF with partners at the Global Recycling Day Event.
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

7.2 Role of Recycling Companies

7.2.1 Hiring, engagements, and permanency

Waste Recyclers Fiji Limited (WRFL) is a private company that plays a significant role in the waste management and recycling sector in Fiji. They have emerged as a key player in the recycling industry, bridging the gap between CPRs and recyclable materials.

One of the essential aspects of WRFL's operations is its engagement with the CPRs. As part of their business model, WRFL purchases scrap metal from CPRs, providing them with a source of income and recognition for

their valuable contribution to waste management. By collaborating with CPRs, WRFL not only supports the informal recycling sector but also empowers these individuals economically.

Moreover, WRFL creates employment opportunities by hiring people as sorters at their yards. These sorters play a crucial role in the recycling process, as they carefully segregate and categorize the collected scrap metal and other recyclable materials. Sorting ensures that the materials are prepared for further processing, maximizing their recycling potential, and reducing waste going to landfills.

WRFL values its employees and seeks to provide a fair and safe working environment. As the company's operations involve handling recyclables and scrap metal, health, and safety protocols are of utmost importance. WRFL ensures that its employees receive proper training and are equipped with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) to minimize the risks associated with their work.

In terms of employment contracts, WRFL is committed to providing clarity and transparency to its workers. The company follows standard labor practices and ensures that its employees have clear contracts that outline their job roles, responsibilities, and remuneration. WRFL also complies with labor laws and regulations to safeguard the rights of its workforce.

As a private company invested in the recycling sector, WRFL's commitment extends beyond just buying scrap from CPRs and employing sorters. The company actively contributes to environmental conservation by reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills, conserving natural resources, and promoting sustainable practices.

7.2.2 Wages and other benefits

Wages and other benefits play a crucial role in the livelihoods and well-being of CPRs and workers involved in waste management. Ensuring fair and adequate compensation, along with additional benefits, can significantly improve the socio-economic conditions of these individuals and their families.

Providing fair wages to CPRs and workers acknowledges the importance of their contributions to waste management and recycling. Fair compensation reflects the value of their labor and ensures that they can meet their basic needs and support their families.

Timely payment of wages is essential for CPRs and workers to maintain financial stability and plan for their future. Regular and predictable payment cycles create a sense of security and reliability in their income.

In addition to wages, access to social welfare support can provide a safety net for CPRs during time of financial hardship or emergencies. Government and civil society organizations can play a crucial role in providing social welfare schemes and assistance to CPRs.

Due to the nature of their work, CPRs and workers may face health risks and exposure to hazardous materials. Access to healthcare benefits, including medical insurance and coverage for medical expenses, can support their well-being and improve health outcomes.

Ensuring equal wages and benefits for women and men involved in waste management promotes gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

7.3 Role of Municipal Bodies

7.3.1 Hiring, contracts, and permanency

Hiring municipal council workers directly to carry out waste collection and disposal tasks is essential in recognizing their significance in maintaining the cleanliness and hygiene of cities and towns. By employing them formally, municipalities legitimize their contributions to the community and ensure that waste management services are efficiently carried out.

Offering contracts to municipal council workers provides them with a sense of stability and security in their employment. Fixed-term contracts or permanent employment help guarantee a steady income and access to social benefits like healthcare, paid leave, and pension schemes. This not only improves the workers' financial well-being but also boosts their morale and dedication to their work.

Job permanency for municipal council workers, especially garbage collectors and truck drivers, is essential to retain skilled and experienced personnel in the waste management sector. With job security, workers are more likely to invest in their skills and develop a deep understanding of waste collection and disposal procedures, leading to enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in their roles.

Moreover, providing proper training, safety gear, and equipment to municipal council workers is crucial for their health and safety. Waste collection and disposal activities can expose them to various hazards, such as sharp objects or toxic waste. Ensuring they have the necessary tools and knowledge to perform their duties safely reduces the risk of accidents and health issues.

Collaboration between municipal councils, CPRs, and NGOs, can help in formulating fair and inclusive policies that benefit all stakeholders involved in waste management. Open communication and engagement with council workers can lead to the identification of their specific needs and challenges, leading to better work environments and improved waste management practices.

In conclusion, municipal council workers, including garbage collectors and truck drivers, are essential members of the waste management workforce. Hiring them directly, offering contracts, and ensuring job permanency are crucial steps in recognizing their vital contributions and ensuring the efficiency and sustainability of waste management systems in cities and towns.

7.3.2 Gender Disparity and Job Roles

Gender disparity in job roles within municipal councils is a significant issue that needs to be addressed to promote gender equality and inclusivity in the workforce. Traditionally, certain job roles within councils have been dominated by one gender, leading to a lack of diversity and representation.⁸

In many cases, job roles that involve physical labor, such as garbage collection, waste sorting, or street cleaning, have been predominantly assigned to male workers. On the other hand, administrative and managerial positions have often been occupied by female employees. This gender-based division of labor

⁸ The details provided are based on the observations made by the mapping team during their fieldwork and interactions.

not only perpetuates stereotypes but also limits the career opportunities and advancement of women within municipal councils.

Addressing gender disparity in job roles requires a multi-faceted approach, involving both policy changes and cultural shifts. Here are some key steps that can be taken to promote gender equality in councils:

Gender-Neutral Hiring and Recruitment: Implementing gender-neutral hiring practices ensures that job opportunities are equally accessible to men and women. Job advertisements should be inclusive and avoid language that may discourage candidates from underrepresented genders from applying.

Training and Skill Development: Providing training and skill development opportunities for all employees, regardless of gender, helps break down barriers and enables individuals to compete for a wide range of job roles. This can include offering training programs for women in fields traditionally dominated by men and vice versa.

Breaking Stereotypes: Challenging stereotypes and biases within the council's organizational culture is essential. Encouraging discussions about gender roles and biases can promote a more inclusive work environment where individuals are judged based on their skills and qualifications rather than their gender.

Mentorship and Support: Creating mentorship programs and support networks for women within councils can be instrumental in fostering their career growth and development. Having role models and mentors can provide guidance and encouragement to women who aspire to take on leadership roles within the organization.

Equal Pay and Benefits: Ensuring equal pay for equal work is a critical step in promoting gender equality. It is essential to review pay scales regularly and address any disparities based on gender. Additionally, providing equal access to benefits and opportunities for career advancement is crucial.

Family-Friendly Policies: Implementing family-friendly policies, such as flexible working hours and parental leave, can help balance work and family responsibilities for both male and female employees.

Gender Sensitization Training: Conducting gender sensitization training for all employees can create awareness about gender-related issues and promote a more inclusive and respectful workplace culture.

7.4 Role of Non-Profit Organizations

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in supporting the CPRs – community-based recycling programs led by CPRs. By providing essential assistance, resources, and expertise, NGOs can empower these CPRs to enhance their impact on waste management, environmental conservation, and the well-being of the CPRs and their communities.

Here are some ways in which NGOs can support the CPRs:

Capacity Building and Training: NGOs can conduct capacity-building workshops and training programs for CPRs. These initiatives can focus on waste sorting techniques, recycling best practices, health and safety training, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship development. Enhancing the skills and knowledge of the CPRs ensures their efficiency and effectiveness in recycling operations.

Access to Resources: NGOs can help the CPRs access essential resources such as collection equipment, safety gear, and recycling infrastructure. Providing CPRs with the necessary tools and resources enhances their ability to collect and sort recyclable materials effectively.

Market Linkages: One of the significant challenges faced by the CPRs is finding markets for their collected recyclables. NGOs can establish partnerships with recycling industries or businesses that can purchase these materials at fair prices. Facilitating market linkages enables CPRs to generate income from their recycling efforts, making their work more sustainable.

Advocacy and Policy Support: NGOs can advocate for supportive policies and regulations that recognize the role of the CPRs in waste management. By engaging with local authorities and policymakers, NGOs can help create an enabling environment for CPRs to operate, ensuring their contributions are acknowledged and valued.

Social and Health Support: NGOs can provide social support to the CPRs, addressing issues of discrimination and social stigma they may face. Additionally, they can offer health support through medical camps, health check-ups, and access to healthcare services, addressing the health risks associated with waste picking.

Awareness and Education: NGOs can conduct awareness campaigns to promote recycling practices among communities, businesses, and institutions. By raising awareness about the importance of recycling and the role of CPRs, NGOs can foster a culture of responsible waste management.

Research and Data Collection: NGOs can conduct research on waste management practices, recycling trends, and the socio-economic impact of the CPRs. Gathering data and evidence-based information helps in better understanding the challenges and opportunities faced by the CPRs, enabling targeted interventions.

Financial Support: Providing financial support to the CPRs can help them invest in infrastructure, expand their operations, and improve their working conditions. Funding from NGOs can also be used to establish recycling centers or material recovery facilities to streamline the recycling process.

Networking and Collaboration: NGOs can facilitate networking and collaboration among different CPRs and other stakeholders in the recycling sector. Creating a platform for knowledge exchange, sharing best practices, and fostering partnerships strengthens the collective impact of the CPRs.

By actively engaging with the CPRs and tailoring their support to meet specific needs, NGOs can create lasting and positive change in waste management practices. Empowering these CPRs not only benefits the environment but also uplifts the lives of CPRs and their communities, promoting a more sustainable and inclusive future.

Chapter 8: Policies and Recommendations

8.1 Policy Recommendations

8.1.1 Inclusive Policy Framework

Governments should develop a comprehensive policy framework that recognizes CPRs as crucial contributors to waste management and recycling systems. These policies should include regulations that formalize the sector, granting CPRs the same protections and rights as other workers.

8.1.2 Health and Safety Measures

Implementing policies that mandate the provision of health and safety equipment for CPRs can significantly reduce the risks associated with their job. Regular health check-ups and insurance coverage can also be part of this policy package.

8.1.3 Capacity Building and Skill Training

Policies should be designed to include capacity building and skill training for CPRs. This can be facilitated through collaborations with NGOs and industry partners to improve CPRs' knowledge of safe and effective waste sorting and recycling practices, enhancing their productivity and earnings potential.

8.1.4 Access to Waste Management Infrastructure

Governments can facilitate easier access to waste management facilities and dumpsites for CPRs, which would enhance their productivity. For instance, permits could be issued that allow CPRs to access these sites at designated times.

8.1.5 Social Security and Welfare Programs

CPRs should be included in social security schemes and welfare programs that provide financial aid, food security, and housing support. Governments could consider creating special programs tailored to the needs of CPRs and their families.

8.1.6 Market Access and Fair Pricing

Policies should be put in place to ensure that CPRs receive a fair price for the recyclables they collect. This could involve setting minimum price standards for various types of recyclables and implementing transparency measures in the trading process.

8.1.7 Education and Awareness Campaigns

Government bodies, in conjunction with NGOs and community organizations, should conduct public awareness campaigns about the essential role of CPRs. Promoting respect and understanding within communities can help reduce the stigma associated with waste picking.

8.1.8 Child Protection and Right to Education

For waste picking families with children, policies must ensure the protection of children's rights, including the right to education. Child labor in waste picking must be strictly prohibited, and educational programs for children in these families should be prioritized.



Recycling on the Go (ROG) Ambassadors (*they advocate change in mindset and behavior in schools*).
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

8.1.9 Gender Sensitivity

Policies should address the specific challenges faced by women CPRs, including safety issues and the risk of gender-based violence. This could include measures such as gender-sensitivity training for local authorities and the provision of safe facilities for women at waste management sites.

8.1.9 Public-Private Partnerships

Governments should consider establishing partnerships with private sector businesses, particularly those in the recycling industry, to create more opportunities for CPRs. These partnerships could provide stable employment, better income, and improved working conditions for CPRs.

8.1.10 Expert Partner Collaboration

The collaboration between esteemed organizations such as the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), Fiji Cancer Society (FCS), the Consumer Council of Fiji, and key government bodies has the potential to yield substantial benefits for the waste picking community in Fiji. These expert partners can offer their unique insights and resources to comprehensively address the challenges faced by CPRs, promoting their well-being and upliftment.

Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC): FWCC's extensive experience in addressing gender-related issues positions them to play a critical role in empowering female CPRs. Through tailored workshops and programs, they can provide CPRs with the tools to tackle gender-based challenges and assert their rights. Additionally, FWCC's counseling services can offer vital emotional support, assisting CPRs in managing the psychological strains of their work.

Fiji Cancer Society (FCS): FCS's involvement can prove invaluable in raising awareness about the health hazards linked to waste picking, notably exposure to hazardous materials. Their educational initiatives can educate CPRs about preventive measures, while their healthcare support ensures that CPRs' health remains a priority. By working in tandem with FCS, CPRs can adopt healthier practices and access necessary medical attention.

Consumer Council of Fiji: With its focus on financial literacy and consumer rights, the Consumer Council of Fiji can empower CPRs in financial management. Equipping CPRs with knowledge on budgeting, savings, and informed decision-making enhances their economic security. Furthermore, understanding consumer rights empowers CPRs to advocate for their fair treatment and protection from exploitative practices.

Collaboration with Key Ministries and Institutes: Engaging with institutions such as the Department of Environment (DOE), Ministry of Education (MOE) can lead to skill-building and educational initiatives for CPRs, potentially enhancing their employability and future opportunities. The Ministry of Health (MOH) can contribute by providing health services and awareness programs tailored to CPRs' needs. The Ministry for Women and Poverty Alleviation (MOW) can offer support in addressing gender disparities and promoting gender equality within the waste picking profession. Institutes like Fiji National University (FNU) and the University of the South Pacific (USP) can extend academic resources and research capabilities to inform sustainable solutions.

Incorporating the expertise of these organizations and institutions in collaboration with expert partners like FWCC, FCS, and the Consumer Council of Fiji can create a powerful network that addresses a spectrum of challenges faced by CPRs. Through their collective efforts, CPRs can be empowered to lead more secure, dignified, and enriched lives.

8.2 Other Key Recommendations

8.2.1 Sensitization and Training for Council Employees

Addressing the issue of discrimination faced by CPRs at the dumpsite and on the streets requires implementing sensitization and training programs for municipal council employees. These programs aim to create awareness about the valuable role CPRs play in waste management and the broader community, fostering a more inclusive and empathetic environment.

To start, cultural awareness workshops can be conducted for council employees, helping them understand the challenges faced by CPRs and the importance of treating them with respect and dignity. Through these workshops, employees can gain insights into the lives and struggles of CPRs, paving the way for better interactions and mutual understanding.

To initiate this transformation, awareness workshops can serve as a foundational step. By providing insights into the challenges CPRs encounter and their significant role in waste management and the community, these workshops foster understanding and empathy among council employees. Training programs on gender awareness, like those provided by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), can be integrated to address gender-related discrimination and stereotypes.

Anti-discrimination training is another crucial aspect of the recommendation. By providing such training, council employees can learn about inclusive practices and ways to avoid discriminatory behavior. This training encourages them to engage in respectful interactions with CPRs, refraining from using derogatory language or engaging in harmful stereotypes.

Conflict resolution skills can also be offered to help council employees handle disputes or conflicts with CPRs in a constructive and compassionate manner. These skills empower employees to navigate difficult situations while respecting the rights and dignity of CPRs.

Furthermore, collaboration between municipal councils, CPRs' cooperatives, and NGOs can play a vital role in developing guidelines and codes of conduct for council employees when interacting with CPRs. This collaborative approach ensures that all stakeholders are involved in creating a positive working environment for CPRs.

Establishing mechanisms for monitoring and reporting incidents of discrimination at the dumpsite and on the streets is crucial for prompt intervention and remedial actions. These mechanisms will hold employees accountable for their actions and encourage them to adopt more inclusive practices.

Finally, institutional support from municipal councils is essential to ensure the success of the sensitization and training programs. By providing backing and commitment, councils can demonstrate the importance of treating CPRs as equal members of the community, deserving of respect and fair treatment.

Through these efforts, municipal council employees can develop a deeper understanding of CPRs' contributions and challenges. This will lead to more supportive and inclusive interactions, reducing social isolation and discrimination faced by CPRs. Ultimately, this initiative will foster a more harmonious waste management ecosystem in Fiji, where CPRs are recognized and appreciated for their vital role in promoting sustainability and community well-being.

8.2.2 Promoting Mental Health Support

Considering the profound impact of social isolation and discrimination on CPRs' mental well-being, it is imperative to take concrete steps toward empowering and supporting them. To begin, launching mental health awareness campaigns can serve as a crucial starting point. By collaborating with government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations, these campaigns can dispel the stigmas surrounding mental health and foster open dialogue, encouraging CPRs to seek support when facing emotional challenges.

Culturally sensitive mental health services are also essential in providing effective support. Tailoring mental health programs to the unique cultural context of CPRs can bridge communication gaps and ensure a more empathetic approach to addressing their specific hardships. Mental health professionals can benefit from specialized training to better understand and respond to the emotional challenges CPRs face.

Creating safe and welcoming support groups and counseling services dedicated to CPRs can become transformative spaces. Here, they can share their experiences, emotions, and challenges, finding solace in peer support and learning effective coping techniques to manage stress.

Promoting social inclusion is also key to combating social isolation. By organizing events and activities that bring CPRs and other community members together, a sense of belonging and mutual support can be cultivated.

Partnerships with mental health professionals and organizations can provide valuable expertise and resources to support CPRs' mental health needs. Building meaningful partnerships will enhance the efficacy of mental health support programs and ensure that CPRs receive the best possible care.



Dr. James Fong, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Health, addressing the CPRs about health and safety (Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

8.2.3 Enhancing Safety and Security for CPRs in Fiji

The safety and security concerns faced by CPRs in Fiji are significant and require a comprehensive approach to address effectively. CPRs often endure distressing experiences, including incidents of violence, harassment, and discrimination. These challenges not only impact their physical safety but also take a toll on their mental well-being and overall livelihoods.

Firstly, safety training and awareness initiatives are crucial to equip CPRs with the knowledge and skills to handle potential risks. Regular training sessions can educate CPRs about conflict resolution, self-defense techniques, and preventive measures. By empowering CPRs with the tools to handle potentially violent situations safely, they can navigate their work with greater confidence.

Community policing initiatives hold promise in deterring criminal activities in waste picking areas. By collaborating with law enforcement agencies, community policing can create a safer working environment for CPRs, reducing their fear of violence and harassment, while engagement with the local police department is a crucial step in enhancing their safety. Collaborating with law enforcement agencies can foster a safer working environment by deterring criminal activities, ensuring timely responses to incidents, and promoting a sense of security among CPRs. Establishing a support network for CPRs who experience violence or robbery is equally important. Immediate crisis intervention and access to counseling services can help CPRs cope with trauma and seek justice when needed.

Advocating for designated collection points can significantly reduce conflicts and altercations over recyclables. These points can be monitored to ensure CPRs' safety and well-being while carrying out their work. Moreover, promoting employer awareness and support for CPRs' recycling activities outside of regular work hours can enhance job security and create a more supportive work environment.

NGOs and civil society organizations can play a crucial role in advocating for the rights and dignity of CPRs. Engaging with local authorities and employers can ensure CPRs are treated fairly and have access to safe and secure working conditions. Conducting community awareness campaigns to challenge stigma and discrimination against CPRs is essential to foster understanding and empathy within the community.

Improving health and safety measures at dumpsites is vital to minimize workplace accidents and injuries. Providing CPRs with proper safety equipment and implementing better waste disposal practices can significantly reduce risks associated with their work.

Collaboration between CPRs, NGOs, and local authorities is essential for developing effective strategies. Collective efforts can lead to more comprehensive solutions and better outcomes. Additionally, ensuring CPRs have access to legal support and representation in case of violence or harassment is critical to safeguarding their well-being and protecting their rights.



Team PRF distributing food packs and PPEs to a CPR community.
(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

8.2.4 Improving Access to Basic Necessities and Essential Services

CPRs in Fiji face numerous challenges when it comes to accessing necessities and essential services in their work areas. The proximity of essential facilities, such as shops, washrooms, and health centers, is often limited, leaving CPRs struggling to meet their daily needs. These services are usually located far from waste picking sites, making it difficult for CPRs to access them during working hours. As a result, CPRs often must go without essential items, leading to increased hardships and difficulties in their daily lives.

Among the CPRs surveyed, a significant number reported that shops, police stations, and health centers were distant from their waste picking sites. This lack of proximity exacerbates the challenges CPRs face, particularly during emergencies or when immediate assistance is required. The absence of transportation options in remote areas further compounds the issue. CPRs frequently must carry heavy loads of collected scrap for long distances to reach their homes or designated selling points, leading to physical strain and exhaustion.

For CPR families, ensuring their children's access to education poses another challenge. Schools may be situated far from their homes or workplaces, making it difficult for children to attend regularly. In some cases, the need to earn income through waste picking takes precedence over education, resulting in irregular school attendance and limited opportunities for educational advancement.

To address these pressing issues, comprehensive solutions must be implemented. Local authorities and relevant stakeholders should prioritize the establishment of essential services in waste picking areas. By ensuring the presence of shops, washrooms, and health centers, CPRs can access food, hygiene facilities, and medical assistance more easily, significantly improving their overall well-being.

Mobile services and facilities can also be introduced in waste picking areas. Mobile shops, health clinics, and washrooms that regularly visit these locations will help alleviate the challenge of distant essential services, reducing the time and effort CPRs spend on traveling.

Transportation support is crucial to ease the burden of carrying heavy loads over long distances. Providing CPRs with bicycles or community shuttle services will not only improve their physical well-being but also increase their efficiency in waste collection.

Empowering CPR women should be a priority, as they often face additional barriers in accessing essential services. Establishing safe spaces and resources for CPR women will contribute to their well-being and create a more inclusive waste picking community.

Advocacy efforts should be aimed at raising awareness about CPRs' contributions to society and their right to access necessities and essential services. Promoting understanding and empathy will help in reducing discrimination and social exclusion, fostering a more supportive environment for CPRs.

Furthermore, social, and economic integration of CPRs into mainstream society can lead to greater access to services and opportunities. Policies and initiatives aimed at promoting CPRs' inclusion will bridge the gap between them and essential services, creating a more equitable and sustainable society.

8.2.5 Empowering CPR Children

Access to education is a fundamental right that lays the foundation for a brighter future and economic mobility. However, CPR families in Fiji face significant hurdles in providing their children with quality education. In this essay, we will explore the challenges CPR children encounter in pursuing education and propose actionable recommendations to create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

One of the primary challenges CPR families face is financial constraints. The irregular and unpredictable income earned through waste picking may not always be sufficient to cover school fees, textbooks, uniforms, and other educational expenses. As a result, CPR parents find themselves torn between the necessity to work and the desire to ensure their children receive an education. To address this issue, scholarship programs, and financial support initiatives can be established. By securing funding through collaboration with NGOs and community organizations, these programs can offer much-needed assistance to CPR children, easing the financial burden on their families and opening the doors to education.

Yet, the challenges extend beyond financial constraints. The nature of waste picking work, involving long hours and physical labor, can limit parents' ability to actively engage in their children's education. Balancing the demands of waste picking with supporting their children's educational needs becomes a constant struggle for CPR parents. To address this, flexible schooling options should be explored. By introducing evening classes or part-time schooling, CPR children can balance their education with their parents' work schedules, ensuring they can attend school regularly without sacrificing their parents' livelihoods.

However, even within the classroom, CPR children face a different set of obstacles - discrimination and stigma. Prejudices surrounding waste picking can lead to social exclusion and alienation of these children. Name-calling and negative associations based on their parents' profession affect their self-esteem and hinder their social interactions and integration within their schools and communities. To combat this, anti-stigma campaigns can be launched in schools and communities, promoting empathy, respect, and understanding.

Through collaboration with schools and community leaders, these campaigns can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for CPR children.

Parental engagement is another critical aspect in empowering CPR children. By creating opportunities for CPR parents to be actively involved in their children's education, a strong support system can be established. Parental engagement programs that accommodate their work schedules and offer workshops on how to support their children's learning at home will strengthen the parent-child bond and create a positive learning environment.

To ensure a comprehensive support system, collaboration between schools, NGOs, and CPR communities is crucial. By building strong partnerships, schools can offer additional resources and support, while NGOs can facilitate access to various programs and services benefiting CPR children and their families.

8.2.6 Strengthening Social Welfare Support for CPRs

CPRs in Fiji, play a vital role in sustainable waste management by collecting recyclable materials and diverting them from landfills. Despite their significant contributions to the environment, CPRs face various challenges, including social isolation, discrimination, safety concerns, and lack of access to basic necessities. One pressing issue that hampers the well-being and livelihoods of CPRs is the lack of adequate social welfare support. This essay explores the urgent need to strengthen social welfare systems to uplift CPRs and ensure their socio-economic well-being.

One of the primary recommendations to enhance social welfare support for CPRs is advocating for age-appropriate social welfare schemes. Currently, some CPRs, including young adults, are excluded from accessing welfare assistance due to age restrictions.⁹ However, many young CPRs shoulder significant responsibilities and financial burdens, making them equally deserving of social welfare aid. By removing age restrictions, the scope of social welfare programs can be expanded, benefiting a larger population of CPRs and providing much-needed support.

Another crucial aspect of strengthening social welfare support is ensuring sufficient financial assistance. The amount provided through existing welfare programs must be reviewed to ensure it adequately covers the essential needs of CPRs and their families. The irregular and unpredictable income earned through waste picking can leave CPRs in financial instability throughout the month. By increasing the amount of financial aid, CPRs can access a more stable and reliable source of income, reducing financial hardships and improving their overall well-being.

In addition to financial assistance, it is essential to reassess eligibility criteria for social welfare schemes. Exclusionary criteria, such as the possession of certain household items like a television set, can unfairly deny support to CPRs. Eligibility criteria should be designed to consider the specific circumstances and needs of CPRs, ensuring that those who genuinely require assistance can access it without unnecessary barriers.

Streamlining the application process for social welfare support is equally critical. Delays in processing applications and repeated rejections can exacerbate the vulnerabilities faced by CPRs. Establishing clear and

⁹ This is based on the experiences and understanding of the CPRs and may not accurately reflect the entirety of existing social welfare policies.

accessible channels for CPRs to apply for assistance and ensuring prompt processing of their applications will enable them to receive the support they need in a timely manner.

To build trust and confidence among the CPR communities, transparency and accountability in the allocation and distribution of social welfare resources are paramount. Monitoring the effectiveness of social welfare programs and ensuring that the allocated funds reach their intended beneficiaries will demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of CPRs.

Collaborating with NGOs and civil society organizations is instrumental in designing and implementing targeted support initiatives for CPRs. These partnerships can leverage existing resources and knowledge to maximize the impact of social welfare programs. Tailored support programs, such as financial literacy training, healthcare assistance, and vocational training, can equip CPRs with the necessary skills and resources to uplift themselves from poverty.

While social welfare support is vital, focusing on long-term solutions is equally crucial. Developing vocational training programs, promoting access to formal employment opportunities, and encouraging waste recycling as a sustainable livelihood can empower CPRs to improve their socio-economic conditions beyond the scope of social welfare support.

8.2.7 Addressing Elderly Abuse and Supporting Elderly CPRs in Fiji

One of the most pervasive consequences of elderly abuse is the perception that aging equates to decreased productivity and usefulness. This societal bias often leaves elderly CPRs vulnerable and overlooked in terms of support and recognition for their contributions. The common belief that older individuals are less capable of physical labor or are fewer valuable members of the community can lead to the marginalization of elderly CPRs, leaving them to scavenge on the streets without adequate support.

Elderly CPRs are not only susceptible to physical hardships but also to emotional distress caused by the stigma surrounding their work. Many CPRs have recounted distressing stories of being abandoned by their families, with children migrating and severing ties. The loss of familial support further compounds their vulnerability, increasing their sense of isolation and loneliness. The lack of a strong support system leaves elderly CPRs to face their challenges alone, often leading to emotional strain and psychological burdens.

Moreover, elderly abuse can result in harsh living conditions for elderly CPRs. Some have found themselves homeless due to marital issues or family disputes, forcing them to continue collecting recyclables for survival. These difficult circumstances further diminish their sense of security and well-being, as they struggle to find stable housing and basic necessities.

Addressing elderly abuse among CPRs requires collective efforts at multiple levels. Society must actively challenge ageist attitudes and stereotypes through awareness campaigns and educational programs. By highlighting the valuable contributions of elderly CPRs to sustainable waste management, we can reshape perceptions and foster a more positive view of aging.

Tailored social welfare programs are essential to cater to the specific needs of elderly CPRs. Adequate financial assistance, access to healthcare, and other essential services must be provided to support their well-being and alleviate the challenges they face. Community-based support networks can offer emotional companionship, practical assistance, and avenues for social interaction, reducing their sense of isolation and vulnerability.

Mental health services should be made readily available to address the emotional toll of social isolation and stress experienced by elderly CPRs. Counseling and coping mechanisms can be invaluable in improving their overall well-being and resilience.

Empowerment programs aimed at skill development and capacity building can boost the self-esteem and confidence of elderly CPRs. Offering opportunities for alternative sources of income or involvement in community projects can enhance their sense of purpose and dignity.

Engaging families in supporting elderly CPRs is crucial. Public awareness campaigns can emphasize the importance of family ties and the significance of caring for elderly family members, fostering a culture of respect and compassion.

Collaborating with NGOs and civil society organizations that specialize in elderly care and advocacy can create comprehensive support programs for elderly CPRs, leveraging expertise and resources to make a significant difference.

8.2.8 Addressing Domestic Violence Among CPRs

Domestic violence is a deeply concerning issue faced by some CPRs in Fiji, particularly women. Within the already challenging profession of waste picking, the added burden of domestic abuse further compounds their difficulties. The pervasive societal perception that CPRs, especially women, are economically dependent and powerless perpetuates an environment where domestic violence can thrive.

One significant challenge arises from financial control imposed by partners, limiting CPR women's ability to earn through their profession. This restriction of economic freedom not only hinders their livelihood prospects but also undermines their agency and self-worth. Moreover, some partners may not be supportive of waste picking as a profession, leading to conflicts and strained relationships within households.

The stresses of waste picking, including exposure to hazardous waste, low income, and social stigma, may also contribute to tension within households. In some cases, partners resort to abusive behavior as an outlet for their frustrations. The effects of domestic violence ripple beyond the immediate victims, affecting children who witness or experience violence themselves. This cycle of trauma perpetuates intergenerational challenges and impacts the overall well-being of CPRs and their families.

To address domestic violence among CPRs, a multifaceted and empathetic approach is required. First and foremost, public awareness campaigns can play a crucial role in educating CPRs and their communities about domestic violence, its impact, and available support services. These initiatives aim to break the silence surrounding domestic violence and encourage open dialogue about the issue.

Accessible and confidential support services are paramount in providing a safe space for CPRs experiencing domestic violence. Collaborations between NGOs such as FWCC, local authorities, and healthcare providers can offer counseling, legal assistance, and safe shelters for those in need.¹⁰ These resources should be tailored to the unique challenges faced by CPRs to ensure their effectiveness.

Empowering CPR women with financial literacy training and access to microfinance initiatives can contribute to their economic independence and reduce vulnerability to financial control and abuse. Additionally,

¹⁰ [Fiji Women's Crisis Centre \(FWCC\) is a crucial partner in addressing domestic violence among CPRs](#)

sensitization programs for partners and family members can foster understanding and empathy, promoting supportive relationships within households.

Enhanced economic opportunities for CPRs, including access to better-paying recycling contracts and alternative sources of income, can mitigate tensions related to economic hardships and provide stability within households. Furthermore, counseling and mental health support should be made available to address the emotional toll of waste picking and the additional stress caused by domestic violence.

Strengthening legal protection for CPRs facing domestic violence is crucial. Enforcing laws against domestic abuse and ensuring that CPRs have access to legal recourse and protection from their abusers is vital in safeguarding their rights.

Empowerment workshops for CPRs, especially women, can build their self-esteem and confidence, enabling them to recognize and assert their rights, thus contributing to the prevention of domestic violence.

Child protection programs are essential in providing a safe space for children of CPRs exposed to domestic violence. These programs should prioritize their emotional and psychological well-being and break the cycle of violence for future generations.

Engaging community leaders and stakeholders in discussions about domestic violence fosters community support and commitment to addressing this issue collectively. Community involvement is critical in creating a safe and supportive environment for CPRs facing domestic violence. It is important to note that a helpline card with the toll-free number 1560 is available with FWCC to report violence or seek counseling, providing a lifeline to those in need.

8.2.9 Addressing Prostitution among CPRs

One of the key factors contributing to prostitution among CPRs is extreme poverty. Many CPRs struggle to meet their basic needs due to the irregular and unpredictable income earned through waste picking. Poverty alleviation programs tailored to CPRs can be instrumental in breaking the cycle of sex work. By offering vocational training and job placement services, these programs can create alternative livelihood opportunities, providing CPRs with a pathway to economic stability.

Sensitization and awareness programs are vital in reducing the stigmatization faced by sex workers. These programs can promote understanding and empathy within the community, fostering a more inclusive environment where individuals involved in prostitution are treated with dignity and respect. Collaboration between NGOs, healthcare providers, government agencies, and community-based organizations is essential to offer comprehensive services to sex workers. This multi-sectoral approach ensures that sex workers receive the necessary support and resources to improve their overall well-being.

Moreover, creating economic opportunities that are inclusive and provide fair wages for CPRs can significantly impact their vulnerability. Enhancing their economic stability and social support can reduce the need to engage in sex work as a means of survival.

Mental health support and counseling are critical for sex workers, recognizing the emotional toll that sex work can take. Offering coping mechanisms and emotional resilience training can help them navigate the challenges they face and build their resilience.

Empowering women and vulnerable groups within the waste picking community is also fundamental. Promoting gender equality and empowerment can lead to greater autonomy and agency, enabling individuals to make informed choices about their lives and work.

8.3 Registration of CPRs

The registration of informal CPRs is a crucial aspect of promoting their inclusion and empowerment within the waste management system. Informal CPRs often operate on the fringes of society, facing numerous challenges, such as lack of recognition, limited access to resources, and vulnerability to exploitation. By formalizing their status through registration, CPRs can gain essential benefits and protections that contribute to their overall well-being and dignity.

8.3.1 Recognizing CPRs as Valuable Stakeholders

The registration of CPRs as formal stakeholders in the waste management process signifies the acknowledgment of their valuable role in the recycling ecosystem. Through registration, CPRs gain official recognition as essential contributors to sustainable waste management practices. This recognition can lead to increased respect from the community, government, and other stakeholders, helping to reduce the stigma and discrimination they often face.

8.3.2 Access to Social Protection and Welfare Programs

Formal registration enables CPRs to access social protection programs, such as healthcare, education, and financial assistance. These social welfare initiatives can provide a safety net during times of hardship, enhancing the well-being and resilience of CPRs and their families. Additionally, access to health services can address occupational hazards and contribute to improved overall health outcomes.

8.3.3 Empowering CPRs with Legal Protections

Registration grants CPRs legal recognition, entitling them to specific rights and protections under the law. Legal recognition can safeguard CPRs from harassment, exploitation, and unfair treatment, promoting a safer and more secure working environment. By understanding their legal rights, CPRs can also advocate for their interests and seek redress in case of any violations.

8.3.4 Facilitating Access to Economic Opportunities

Registered CPRs may gain access to economic opportunities beyond waste picking. Formal recognition opens doors for training, skill development, and vocational programs, empowering CPRs to diversify their income streams and seek alternative livelihoods. Such opportunities can lead to economic mobility and reduce their dependency solely on waste picking for sustenance.

8.3.5 Enhancing Data Collection and Planning

The registration process provides valuable data on the number, demographics, and working conditions of CPRs. This data can inform evidence-based planning and policy formulation to address the specific needs and challenges faced by CPRs. Understanding the size and characteristics of the CPR population can help design targeted interventions and support programs to maximize their impact.

8.3.6 Strengthening Collaborations and Partnerships

Registration fosters collaboration between CPRs, NGOs, local authorities, and other stakeholders. With formal recognition, CPRs become active participants in waste management discussions and decision-making processes. Strengthening partnerships can lead to joint initiatives that promote CPRs' rights, well-being, and integration into the broader waste management framework.

8.3.7 Supporting Sustainable Waste Management Practices

By registering CPRs, authorities can integrate their activities into formal waste management systems. CPRs can contribute to more efficient waste collection, recycling, and resource recovery. Inclusion in waste management practices enhances the sustainability and circularity of waste management processes, supporting environmental conservation efforts.

8.4 Integrating CPRs into Municipal Collection Points

Integrating CPRs into municipal collection points is a transformative approach that holds immense potential to revolutionize waste management practices in Fiji. CPRs, often marginalized and overlooked, possess valuable expertise in waste segregation and recycling. By partnering with them and formalizing their role in municipal collection points, local authorities can optimize waste collection processes, promote inclusive growth, and foster sustainable waste management practices.

One of the primary advantages of integrating CPRs is the enhancement of waste collection efficiency. CPRs' knowledge of recyclable materials allows for effective sorting and separation at the source, minimizing the burden on municipal waste management systems. Their participation in municipal collection points can significantly reduce recyclable materials ending up in landfills, thus conserving valuable resources and reducing environmental impact.

Additionally, this integration empowers CPRs, providing them with safer and dignified working conditions. Often working in hazardous environments like dumpsites, CPRs face numerous health and safety risks. Integrating them into formal collection points allows for better waste handling practices, access to protective gear, and proper training on handling hazardous materials. As a result, CPRs can enjoy improved well-being and reduced health risks associated with their profession.

Furthermore, this collaboration fosters social and economic benefits for CPRs. Formal recognition and participation in municipal collection points can lead to access to social welfare programs, healthcare, and financial support. Empowering CPRs economically can break the cycle of poverty and provide opportunities for better livelihoods.

By promoting inclusive growth and sustainable waste management practices, this integration contributes to a circular economy. Recycling and reusing materials through CPRs' expertise align with the principles of environmental conservation and resource efficiency. This shift towards a circular economy not only benefits CPRs but also positions Fiji as a responsible and environmentally conscious nation.

However, it is crucial to implement this integration with sensitivity and respect for CPRs' rights and preferences. Engaging in meaningful consultations with CPRs and their representatives is essential to ensure that their voices are heard, and their concerns are addressed. Establishing fair compensation mechanisms and recognizing CPRs as valuable stakeholders in waste management are critical steps to building a successful partnership.

8.5 Waste Infrastructure Development

Waste infrastructure plays a fundamental role in shaping the efficacy and sustainability of waste management systems. To build a robust foundation for sustainable waste management practices in Fiji, the development and enhancement of key waste infrastructure elements are imperative. This subtopic explores various aspects of waste infrastructure, including collection points, transport stations, upcycling, and recycling centers.

8.5.1 Collection Points

Establishing strategically located collection points throughout communities is vital to encourage proper waste disposal and separation at the source. These collection points act as convenient hubs for CPRs and residents to deposit recyclable materials separately from non-recyclable waste. By facilitating easy access to collection points, CPRs can efficiently gather recyclables, reducing the burden on municipal waste collection services. Moreover, community participation in the waste separation process fosters a sense of environmental responsibility among residents, paving the way for a cleaner and greener Fiji.

8.5.2 Transport Stations

Efficient transportation of waste from collection points to processing centers is essential for streamlining waste management operations. Waste transport stations serve as intermediaries between collection points and recycling facilities, ensuring a smooth flow of recyclables and waste. By investing in well-equipped transport stations, authorities can optimize waste logistics and minimize environmental impacts associated with waste transportation. Coordinating transport schedules and routes can lead to cost-effective waste management, enhancing overall sustainability.

8.5.3 Upcycling Centers

Upcycling centers provide valuable spaces for waste transformation and creative reuse. These centers offer opportunities to convert discarded materials into innovative products with higher value, reducing the burden on landfills and conserving resources. Supporting upcycling initiatives not only reduces waste but also fosters local entrepreneurship and job creation. By encouraging collaborations between CPRs, local artisans, and designers, upcycling centers become catalysts for promoting sustainable consumption and production patterns.

8.5.4 Recycling Centers

Recycling centers are the backbone of a circular economy, facilitating the processing and transformation of recyclable materials. Equipped with labor and machinery, these centers sort, clean, and process recyclables into raw materials for manufacturing new products. Investing in state-of-the-art recycling centers enables Fiji to harness the economic and environmental benefits of recycling. Additionally, providing CPRs with access to these facilities empowers them as key stakeholders in the recycling value chain, promoting inclusivity and sustainable waste management.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Throughout this report, we have delved into the challenges faced by CPRs and the profound impact of their work on both the environment and society. One of the most distressing challenges they confront is the pervasive social isolation and discrimination due to their waste picking activities. Instances of name-calling, stigmatization, and exclusion leave CPRs feeling ostracized and hinder their participation in community life.

Additionally, safety and security concerns pose significant risks to CPRs' physical and emotional well-being. Incidents of violence, harassment, and lack of access to essential services in waste picking areas create a hostile and unsafe working environment. CPRs, particularly women, may also experience domestic violence within their households, exacerbating the challenges they already face in their profession.

Access to basic necessities and social welfare support remains inadequate, leaving CPRs vulnerable to financial instability and hardships. Many CPRs struggle to provide education for their children, perpetuating intergenerational challenges. Furthermore, the lack of adequate social welfare support and the burden of ageism disproportionately affect elderly CPRs, leaving them with little recourse for assistance and support.

Despite these challenges, this report also highlights the immense potential and resilience of CPRs. Organizing CPRs and providing capacity-building initiatives can empower them to improve their livelihoods, enhance their skills, and advocate for their rights. Integration of CPRs into formal waste management systems and the promotion of a circular economy can significantly enhance waste management practices and reduce the burden on dumpsites and the landfill.

To drive sustainable change, Fiji must implement comprehensive and inclusive solutions. Strengthening social welfare support and revising eligibility criteria will ensure that CPRs receive the assistance they deserve, regardless of age or circumstances. Capacity-building programs must be tailored to CPRs' needs, providing training in waste management, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship to foster long-term empowerment.

Addressing safety and security concerns requires collaborative efforts between local authorities, CPRs, and relevant stakeholders. Establishing community policing initiatives and support networks can create safer working conditions and protect CPRs from violence and harassment.

The integration of CPRs into formal waste management systems, such as collection points and recycling centers, is essential in recognizing their invaluable role in waste management. By fostering partnerships between CPRs and recycling industries, Fiji can promote a circular economy, leading to a more sustainable future.

Moreover, promoting inclusivity and non-discrimination through community awareness campaigns is pivotal in challenging stigma and social barriers faced by CPRs. By recognizing their vital contributions, Fiji can build an inclusive and empathetic society that values the work of CPRs.

As the mapping exercise concludes, the commitment to empowering CPRs should remain steadfast. Together, we can create a greener, cleaner, and more sustainable future for Fiji, where CPRs are integral to the nation's journey towards environmental preservation and social progress. By uplifting CPRs and supporting their rights, we take a significant step towards building a more equitable and resilient society.

9.1 Exploring Alternative Job Opportunities for CPRs

As the mapping exercise of CPRs in Fiji concludes, it becomes evident that addressing the challenges faced by CPRs in the informal waste collection sector requires a multi-faceted approach. While waste picking provides a livelihood for many individuals who lack access to formal employment opportunities, it is essential to consider the potential for alternative job options that can offer better working conditions, stability, and income. Integrating CPRs into more sustainable and dignified job roles can lead to improved social and economic outcomes for these individuals and their communities. Several alternative job opportunities can be explored to enhance the well-being and economic prospects of CPRs:

9.1.1 Waste Management and Recycling Initiatives

Local authorities and non-profit organizations can invest in waste management and recycling initiatives that go beyond traditional waste picking activities. Creating formal employment opportunities in waste segregation, recycling centers, and waste processing plants can provide CPRs with stable and regulated jobs. Training and capacity-building programs can help CPRs acquire the skills needed to participate in these formal waste management roles effectively.

9.1.2 Vocational Training and Skill Development

Offering vocational training and skill development programs can empower CPRs to pursue alternative livelihoods. Training in areas like carpentry, welding, plumbing, and horticulture can expand their employability and open doors to more stable and higher-paying jobs. Equipping CPRs with diverse skills enables them to transition into different sectors and improve their economic prospects.

9.1.3 Community-Based Enterprise Development

Supporting community-based enterprise development can create opportunities for CPRs to engage in income-generating activities while preserving their waste picking knowledge. Establishing small-scale businesses that produce upcycled products or crafts from recyclable materials can be a sustainable approach. These enterprises can not only provide an additional source of income for CPRs but also contribute to environmental conservation.

9.1.4 Green Jobs and Sustainable Industries

Fiji's transition towards green and sustainable industries offers potential avenues for alternative employment for the CPRs. Initiatives focused on renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and eco-tourism can create job opportunities that align with environmental conservation and waste reduction goals. Encouraging CPRs' participation in these sectors can lead to more meaningful and rewarding careers.

9.1.5 Formalization and Recognition of CPR Alliances

Forming CPR alliances and formalizing their roles can help the CPRs access social protection, financial support, and better working conditions. Government and non-governmental organizations can provide technical assistance and capacity-building to strengthen these alliances, enabling CPRs to negotiate better terms with buyers and increase their collective bargaining power.



Annexes

Lewabeka helps rugby star by picking waste¹¹

FOR the past 22 years Asinate Lewabeka has played a significant role in reducing flooding and keeping the environment pristine and clean. She has done all that while putting food on the table for her family and putting six children through school, including Fijiana 7s bronze medalist Lavena Cavuru. In fact, even though she is too modest to admit it, Ms Lewabeka played a huge part in Cavuru's rugby career.

The 64-year-old matriarch has achieved all that by doing a job that many look down upon — picking through waste at the Vunato landfill in Lautoka. She said she had been the subject of scorn and stigmatisation because of the work she did.

“I have been at this job since late 1998 and it has sustained my family and I for over 20 years,” she said.

Ms Lewabeka said the money she earned from selling bottles and scrap metal kept her family fed, clothed and educated.

“I was able to send my children and support my grandchild Lavena throughout her rugby career, from when she started playing rugby to now. The money I got from selling waste and scrap metal was an investment into her rugby career and also helped my family through financial difficulties as my husband does not work.”

She added during the COVID-19 pandemic when many businesses were forced to close down, waste pickers suffered financially.

“Apart from COVID-19 we also suffer the stigma that is related to this type of work. People will see us and call us ugly names and sometimes throw their rubbish at us, but I just want to let people know that we do this to earn money for our family and put bread and butter on the table.”

Ms Lewabeka acknowledged Waste Recyclers Fiji Ltd (WRFL) and partners for coming up with the workshop to educate waste pickers on gender and human rights, financial literacy and becoming ambassadors of good waste management in the community. She was one of 14 women waste pickers who participated in a wellness and literacy program and a week-long workshop facilitated by WRFL in partnership with Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC), International Union for Conservation of Nature, Environment Department, Fiji Cancer Society and BSP Financial Group.



¹¹ <https://www.pressreader.com/fiji/the-fiji-times/20220624/282179359762449>

Fiji Becomes First Pacific Nation to Recognise ‘Waste Pickers’ as Recycling Heroes¹²

“The workers will now be referred to as the “Collection Pillars of Recycling”.

Fiji has become the first nation in the Pacific to formally acknowledge “waste pickers” — who repurpose, resell, and recycle rubbish for a living — as the environmental champions that they are, and the positive environmental benefit of their work.

The workers — who are typically women, children, and migrants, living in poverty — work in unsafe conditions where they breathe toxic waste and lack employee rights or social security benefits. Despite removing millions of tons of carbon dioxide each year by extracting matter from landfills, they lack rightful recognition as environmental warriors and are instead often subject to slurs and slander.

The acknowledgment was made at a recent council event in Lautoka, Fiji's second-largest city.

There, 30 women were officially registered, given access to bank accounts, and provided with protective clothing, footwear, masks, and gloves. The workers, in collaboration with the city council and Pacific Recycling Foundation, Waste Recyclers Fiji, and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, also coined a new name to replace the informal “waste pickers”: Collection Pillars of Recycling.

The idea of adopting an official name first arose during a week-long workshop, held months prior.

“The workshop was about human rights, gender, legal literacy, and financial literacy and one of the key findings in that workshop was the stigma attached to waste picking. One of the contributors to that stigma was the name ‘informal waste pickers’,” said Pacific Recycling Foundation Founder Amitesh Deo, according to the Fiji Sun.

The workshop also saw Fiji's Department of Environment Director, Sandeep Singh, call out the workers for their vital role in Fiji's waste management and environmental protection sectors. The country, home to 900,000 people, has an ad hoc approach to commercial waste and household recycling, with limited policy and legislation at the national level.

“Your roles complement the global measures taken towards climate adaptation and mitigation,” Singh said.

The East Asian and Pacific region is responsible for the largest generation of waste globally, with 468 million metric tons of municipal solid waste — items from households, businesses, commerce, and institutions — produced annually. Of this, around 50% ends up in landfills, 24% incinerated, and just 9% recycled.

According to United Nations Habitat, “waste pickers” pick up 50-100% of waste in cities within low-income nations. In Jakarta, in neighboring Indonesia, the workers divert 25% of the city's waste to productive use.

The World Bank Group explains that when “properly supported and organized,” the informal waste and recycling sector can create employment, improve local industrial competitiveness, reduce poverty, and reduce municipal spending on solid waste management and social services.

¹² <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/fiji-waste-pickers-recognition/>

PRF to conduct mapping exercise¹³



JUNE 13, 2023

(Photo Credit: FBC News)

The Pacific Recycling Foundation has announced that it will conduct a mapping exercise of the informal waste collection sector in Fiji.

Through this project, the Foundation aims to create a comprehensive database of those involved in waste picking.

PRF Founder, Amitesh Deo, underlines the significance of understanding the difficulties experienced by waste pickers, primarily women and members of the LGBTQ community, who are essential to keeping communities clean and lowering waste pollution.

“So the reason why we’re doing this is, again, to understand the needs of this community so we can provide them structured support. When we say structured support, I want to be very clear. It’s not to create a sense of dependency. We are not going to go out and sort of start handing out money or funds. It’s about empowering these groups. So the strategies on how do we get these groups empowered, financially empowered, economic empowerment and human rights understanding of those things.”

In order to ensure inclusivity and diversity, the PRF team will work closely with community-based groups and stakeholders when they begin their fieldwork in late June.

The information acquired will help in formulating plans to enhance living and working conditions.

¹³ <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/prf-to-conduct-mapping-exercise/>

PRF to conduct a mapping exercise of the informal waste collection sector in Fiji¹⁴



JUNE 13, 2023

(Photo Credit: Fiji Village)

Pacific Recycling Foundation Founder Amitesh Deo announced today during a press conference at their office in Koronivia that they will conduct a mapping exercise of the informal waste collection sector in Fiji.

Deo says they aim to create a comprehensive database of those involved in waste picking, which will be useful for policy-makers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

He says PRF is committed to bringing attention to the challenges faced by Collection Pillars of Recycling and advocating for their rights, and this particular mapping exercise is a first for Fiji's waste-picking sector.

The Founder says they will work closely with Collection Pillars of Recycling, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders to collect data on their socio-economic and environmental conditions, including their living conditions, access to basic services and amenities, and work-related challenges.

This project is in partnership with Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing.

¹⁴ <https://www.fjivillage.com/news/PRF-to-conduct-a-mapping-exercise-of-the-informal-waste-collection-sector-in-Fiji-4r85xf/>

Mapping Of Waste Collection Sector to Help Remove Stigma¹⁵

[PRF founder Amitesh Deo said the project would shed light on an important but often overlooked aspect of waste management and call attention to the challenges faced by CPRs especially their human rights to be treated with dignity and respect.](#)



JUNE 14, 2023

(Photo Credit: The Fiji Sun)

A mapping exercise of the informal waste collection sector in Fiji will be at the core of efforts to remove the social stigma attached to it.

The move is to help create a database of individuals involved in the trade.

A first of its kind for Fiji and the Pacific region, the initiative is being spearheaded by the Pacific Recycling Foundation (PRF) in partnership with Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WEIGO), a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods.

It will also be assisted by the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and will document the social and personal issues faced by Fiji's waste pickers, who are now referred to as Collection Pillars of Recycling (CPR).

PRF founder Amitesh Deo said the project would shed light on an important but often overlooked aspect of waste management and call attention to the challenges faced by CPRs especially their human rights to be treated with dignity and respect.

¹⁵ <https://fijisun.com.fj/2023/06/14/mapping-of-waste-collection-sector-to-help-remove-stigma/>

Mapping exercise scheduled for Fiji's informal waste collection sector¹⁶



JUNE 16, 2023

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

A mapping exercise aimed at improving the working and living conditions of the informal waste collection sector in Fiji will be carried out by Pacific Recycling Foundation (PRF) in late June and early July.

This, according to PRF's founder Amitesh Deo.

Through the project, the foundation aims to create a comprehensive database of those involved in waste picking, which will be useful for policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

The data from the mapping exercise will also help PRF in developing strategies to provide structured support to these individuals, aimed at creating opportunities to eventually move them to the formal sector through green jobs.

“The informal waste collection sector, comprised mainly of waste pickers who are now known as collection pillars of recycling, play a crucial role in keeping our communities clean and reducing the amount of waste that ends up in landfill, dumpsites or our oceans,” Mr Deo said.

“PRF will work closely with CPRs, community-based organisations, and other stakeholders to collect data on their socio-economic and environmental conditions, including their living conditions, access to basic services and amenities, and work-related challenges.”

He said the project would be carried out in partnership with 'Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing' (WIEGO).

¹⁶ <https://www.fijitimes.com/mapping-exercise-scheduled-for-fjijis-informal-waste-collection-sector/>

“We are requesting organisations, municipalities, groups, and individuals who may have information about people who are involved in waste picking to relay the message to them about this mapping exercise as we don’t want to miss anyone.”

He acknowledged the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and Asco Motors for assisting in the mapping exercise.

The FWCC will provide counselling services on a needs-basis during the exercise, while Asco Motors will provide a vehicle for the traveling PRF team.

WIEGO is a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods.

FWCC assists PRF exercise for vulnerable communities¹⁷

The Fiji Women's Crisis Centre is assisting the Pacific Recycling Foundation in conducting a mapping exercise of the country's informal waste collection sector.

FWCC Coordinator Shamima Ali says the centre is providing counsellors, with the realization that many collection pillars of recycling come from vulnerable communities and may have a traumatic history.

Ali says FWCC's assistance will provide counselling services to CPRs during the mapping exercise.



JUNE 20, 2023

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

PRF Founder Amitesh Deo says through FWCC's assistance, PRF will be able to coordinate counselling services as well as referrals.

He adds the mapping exercise aims to create a comprehensive database of those involved in waste picking, which will be useful for policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders.

¹⁷ <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/fwcc-assists-prf-exercise-for-vulnerable-communities/>

CPR commends mapping exercise¹⁸



JULY 6, 2023

(Photo Credit: FBC News)

Asinate Lewabeka, a 64-year-old Collection Pillar of Recycling, has expressed gratitude towards the Pacific Recycling Foundation for its unwavering support.

Lewabeka stresses the impact of PRF's mapping exercise in bringing attention to the needs of local communities and garnering crucial government support has been nothing short of transformative.

Lewabeka, a mother of six, says by addressing their challenges and advocating for their concerns, PRF has elevated their voices, ensuring that their struggles are no longer overlooked.

The work carried out by Lewabeka and her fellow community members has resulted in the extraction of millions of tons of carbon dioxide from the Vunato landfill annually.

PRF Founder, Amitesh Deo says the mapping exercise has been a rollercoaster ride for them.

"It's quite difficult, the stories that we are coming to find. So our plea to everyone will be to bear with us as we continue with the mapping exercise. Our team is also quite impacted by the whole exercise, because they are seeing things that they have not experienced before. But they came a bit prepared. It's very difficult to see children in those spaces who don't have access to basic things."

Deo adds their tireless efforts have already demonstrated a positive impact on communities and organizations when they work together towards a shared goal.

¹⁸ <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/cpr-commends-mapping-exercise/>

Mapping exercise reveals shocking truth¹⁹

The Pacific Recycling Foundation has so far engaged with nearly 200 individuals involved in the waste collection during their mapping exercise.

Founder, Amitesh Deo says over the past two weeks, they have visited Rakiraki, Tavua, Ba, and are now in Lautoka City.

They aim to document the experiences and challenges faced by these unsung heroes of environmental sustainability.



JULY 5, 2023

(Photo Credit: FBC News)

Despite the slow progress of the mapping process, Deo says this gives them invaluable firsthand accounts as they are hearing from those engaged in this essential work.

“And we are hearing a lot of different types of stories. Some of them are quite empowering. For example, we have got stories in different areas where women waste pickers have built their homes, done waste picking for many years now, and been able to support their families and all of those things, and are able to put food on the table. But amongst them there are also stories of real struggle and challenges. We have got several waste pickers in communities going through very serious situations of harassment, stigma and abuse.”

Deo says historically, their struggles and contributions have gone unnoticed, without organizations, institutions, or government agencies willing to listen and address their concerns.

The PRF's initiative is filling this void by offering a safe space for waste collectors to be heard, understood, and supported.

Through this exercise, Deo says they aim to foster a sense of dignity, respect, and recognition among these hardworking individuals who are crucial to the environmental well-being of Fiji.

¹⁹ <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/mapping-exercise-reveals-shocking-truth/>



JULY 5, 2023

(Photo Credit: FBC News)

Moreover, by amplifying the stories of these waste collectors, the PRF hopes to raise awareness among the wider public about the vital role they play in sustainable waste management.

No shame in the work I do as this is for my children – Collection Pillar of Recycling²⁰

“There is no shame in the work I am involved in as I am doing this for my children.”



JULY 5, 2023

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

Pacific Recycling Foundation Founder Amitesh Deo says these were the words of a mother of 5 who is a Collection Pillar of Recycling that they came across during their mapping exercise of the informal waste collection sector.

Deo further says the mother revealed to the team she started going to the dumpsite following the devastation caused by TC Winston in 2016 where she collected timber, roofing iron, and tarpaulins to rebuild her house as the money she received through the assistance package was not enough.

The PRF Founder and Waste Recyclers Limited CEO says the 35-year-old woman revealed her community members reacted negatively and even scolded her, however, she has never looked back and continues to go to the dumpsite to help her husband put food on the table.

He further says she has also introduced a barter system whereby she collects items like cheese, tin stuff, combs, mirrors, and hair dye and also picks vegetables from the dumpsite which she shares with her friends in exchange for baby milk and diapers for her youngest child who is two years old.

Deo says a key finding made by the team was that she does not collect scrap metals and other recyclables from the dumpsite for cash but looks for items like pots, pans, water bottles, and buckets for household use.

The PRF Founder says she also revealed that her husband is ashamed of her work, however, she has told him not to listen to others as she is going to the dumpsite to ensure her family is able to survive as the husband is a seasonal worker.

²⁰ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/No-shame-in-the-work-I-do-as-this-is-for-my-children--Informal-waste-picker-8f4x5r/>

He says in another case, a 28-year-old woman who has a two-year-old child, resorted to collecting cans and beer bottles from the dumpsite to earn a living as her husband used to take her lease money which he spent on drugs and alcohol.

The PRF Founder further says the woman now resides with her parents as she was in an abusive relationship.

He says in a separate case, a 35-year-old woman who has been living on the streets for more than 20 years is surviving by selling recyclables such as PET bottles, cans, scrap metals, and glass bottles.

She currently lives in an abandoned and run-down house with another street dweller.

Deo says following the mapping exercise, the PRF in partnership with relevant government and donor agencies, and development partners would be able to coordinate structured support to improve the working and living conditions of these individuals to ensure they are able to better support their families.

He confirms they have made some referrals to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre as some people needed immediate assistance such as counselling services and other necessary support.

These are just a few of many cases the PRF team captured in the mapping exercise which continues in the Western Division.

The PRF team will continue the mapping exercise this week in Lautoka, Nadi, and Sigatoka before moving to Suva and Nausori, while a team will also be travelling to Labasa and Savusavu.

The Pacific Recycling Foundation's mapping exercise of informal waste collection is being conducted in partnership with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), FWCC, Asco Motors, and Tourism Fiji.

'Battling stigma' in waste picking²¹



JULY 6, 2023

(Photo Credit: The Fiji Times)

Heartbreaking stories of Fijians involved in informal waste picking who are battling stigma and very low income among many other challenges were captured in an inaugural mapping exercise conducted by the Pacific Recycling Foundation in communities in the West.

PRF founder Amitesh Deo said those 150 individuals displayed incredible resiliency and strength and came out with inspiring stories of how they managed to earn a living and support their families by waste picking.

The exercise focused on communities in Rakiraki, Tavua, Ba, and Lautoka on their socioeconomic and environmental conditions, living conditions, access to basic services and amenities, and work-related challenges.

"We will also be co-ordinating with relevant government agencies to ensure some of these families who are living in extreme poverty can tap into social protection benefits," said Mr Deo.

"There is hope that following the mapping exercise, we will work in partnership with relevant government and donor agencies and development partners to co-ordinate structured support to improve the working and living conditions of these individuals to ensure they can better support their families," he said.

"We also made some referrals to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre as some people needed immediate assistance such as counselling services and other necessary support particularly those battling domestic violence."

The mapping exercise of informal waste collection is being conducted in partnership with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), FWCC, Asco Motors, and Tourism Fiji.

Through this mapping exercise, the PRF aims to create a comprehensive database of those involved in waste picking, which will be useful for policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

²¹ <https://www.fijitimes.com/battling-stigma-in-waste-picking/>

Increase in dependency on waste collection to make income²²

The Pacific Recycling Foundation has so far captured 1,059 people in its Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector in the country.

Chief Executive Amitesh Deo says the exercise covered the whole of Viti Levu, as well as Labasa and Savusavu.

Deo says of the 1,059 individuals, 675 are fully dependent on waste collection as their primary source of income, while 379 individuals stated that their secondary source of income is derived from waste picking.



JULY 24, 2023

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

He claims many of these individuals do not have access to clean water, toilets, or hygienic places to have meals while waste picking.

The PRF's Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector is being done through a questionnaire interview that focuses on the socioeconomic and environmental conditions, living conditions, access to basic services and amenities, and work-related challenges of those involved in waste picking.

He says through this mapping exercise, the PRF aims to create a comprehensive database of those involved in waste picking, which will be useful for policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Deo says PRF's Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector in Fiji has allowed the Foundation to gain deep insights into the practices of both the formal and informal waste collection sectors.

²² <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/increase-in-dependency-on-waste-collection-to-make-income/>

1,059 people have been identified with 675 fully dependent on waste collection as their primary source of income - Deo²³



JULY 24, 2023

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

After 3 weeks of the Pacific Recycling Foundation's Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector in Fiji, 1,059 people have been identified, comprising 472 females, 570 males, and 17 belonging to the LGBTQI+ community.

Founder of the Pacific Recycling Foundation and CEO of Waste Recyclers Fiji Limited, Amitesh Deo made the revelation following the exercise which covered the whole of Viti Levu as well as Labasa and Savusavu.

Deo says these numbers include those that have been interviewed and profiled around the country as well as some individuals that may have been missed due to reasons which will be revealed in the report, to be released next month.

He further says of the 1,059 individuals, 675 are fully dependent on waste collection as their primary source of income while 379 individuals stated that their secondary source of income is derived from waste picking.

The PRF Founder says many of these individuals do not have access to clean water, toilet, and hygienic places to have meals while waste picking with 186 people revealed they use the bushes as their toilet.

He further says these individuals are exposed to many risks, particularly health risks which have a direct impact on the sustainability of their livelihoods.

Deo says the PRF's Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector in Fiji has been done in partnership with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and through the support of partners such as Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Asco Motors and Tourism Fiji, has allowed the Foundation to gain deep insights into the practices of both formal and informal waste collection sector.

²³ <https://www.fjivillage.com/news/1059-people-have-been-identified-with-675-fully-dependent-on-waste-collection-as-their-primary-source-of-income---Deo-8x4f5r/>

He further says there have been a number of cases where those involved in informal waste picking are facing unimaginable challenges of homelessness and poverty.

The PRF Founder says a woman who collects and sells recyclables was found living in an abandoned house wearing wet clothes despite the cold weather and displayed little concern for her discomfort and carried on with the conversation.

He further says this endurance underscores the harsh realities she faces daily, yet remains resilient in her pursuit of survival. The CEO says the woman displayed signs of resentment and fear, expressing reluctance to engage in an open conversation and these signs pointed to a possible traumatic response from past experiences.

He further says recognising the need for immediate support, the woman has been referred to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre for counseling and other necessary support.

The PRF's Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector is being done through a questionnaire interview which focuses on the socioeconomic and environmental conditions, living conditions, access to basic services and amenities, and work-related challenges of those involved in waste picking.

Through this mapping exercise, the PRF aims to create a comprehensive database of those involved in waste picking, which will be useful for policy-makers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector²⁴

1,059 people have so far been captured in the Pacific Recycling Foundations Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector in Fiji, comprising 472 females, 570 males, and 17 belonging to the LGBTQI+ community, revealed the Founder of the PRF and CEO of Waste Recyclers Fiji Limited, Amitesh Deo.

The PRF's Founder made the revelation following three weeks of Mapping Exercise which covered the whole of Viti Levu as well as Labasa and Savusavu.

“These numbers include those that have been interviewed and profiled around the country as well as some individuals that may have been missed due to reasons which will be revealed in the report, to be released in August 2023,” said Deo.



JULY 24, 2023

(Photo Credit: Pacific Recycling Foundation)

Of the 1,059 individuals, 675 are fully dependent on waste collection as their primary source of income while 379 individuals stated that their secondary source of income is derived from waste picking.

Many of these individuals do not have access to clean water, toilet, and hygienic places to have meals while waste picking. 186 people revealed they use bushes as their toilet.

He said these individuals are exposed to many risks, particularly health risks which have a direct impact on the sustainability of their livelihoods.

Deo said the PRF's Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector in Fiji which has been done in partnership with Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) and through the support of partners such as Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, Asco Motors and Tourism Fiji, has allowed the Foundation to gain deep insights into the practices of both formal and informal waste collection sector.

There have been a number of cases where those involved in informal waste picking are facing unimaginable challenges of homelessness and poverty.

“In one particular case, a woman who collects and sells recyclables was found living in an abandoned house. She was wearing wet clothes despite the cold weather and displayed little concern for her discomfort and carried on with the conversation. This endurance underscores the harsh realities she faces daily, yet remains resilient in her pursuit of survival.

²⁴ <https://fijionenews.com.fj/mapping-exercise-of-the-waste-collection-sector/>

Throughout the interview, the woman displayed signs of resentment and fear, expressing reluctance to engage in an open conversation and these signs pointed to a possible traumatic response from past experiences,” revealed Deo.

He said recognising the need for immediate support, the woman has been referred to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre for counseling and other necessary support.

In another case, the PRF team interviewed a man who walks long distances in search of recyclables for his daily survival and usually sleeps under a building in the car park area. He revealed people usually told him they would rather throw away waste materials than give them to him.

“This perception of people had added an extra layer of hardship to his already difficult life. However, the man was not alone in his endeavors. His wife, a once-orphaned young woman, stood by his side, supporting him in their waste-picking journey. Together, they travelled long distances, gathering recyclables to sustain their livelihood,” stated Deo.

According to the PRF Founder, the man's wife suffered from chronic health issues, including asthma, which plagued her ability to help her husband. He said the man revealed in the interview that seeking medical attention became a struggle as they faced repeated blame from medical staff for her frequent hospital visits, hindering her access to the essential treatment she desperately required. The woman who was 26 years old, has passed away.

“Our team also interviewed a mother of three who is involved in informal waste picking with her husband. It was brought to our attention that she was breastfeeding her baby and carrying two other children with her while waste-picking. While speaking to her, our team found out that one of her children was involved in a road accident last year and is now partially incapacitated. She revealed they are yet to receive accident compensation and are also facing huge obstacles in accessing the medical report for her son from the hospital, which they need for his overseas medical treatment,” revealed Mr. Deo.

The PRF has also referred this case to the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and is also liaising with relevant agencies and authorities to support this woman.

The PRF's Mapping Exercise of the Waste Collection Sector is being done through a questionnaire interview which focuses on the socioeconomic and environmental conditions, living conditions, access to basic services and amenities, and work-related challenges of those involved in waste picking.

Through this mapping exercise, the PRF aims to create a comprehensive database of those involved in waste picking, which will be useful for policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Howard, a waste collector's son to a waste preservation advocator²⁵



Leigh Howard used to feel embarrassed about being a waste picker's son but those childhood memories inspired him to make a difference in Tourism with his employer. Mr Howard is the Chief Operations Officer of Tourism Fiji. His position in the organization plays a crucial role in ensuring the organisation operates effectively across all its offices globally and achieves the goals laid out in our Corporate Plan 2022 – 2024.

Born and raised in Fiji, Mr Howard has over 11 years in leadership and management



positions in Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji with the AOT Group and ATS Pacific and holds a Master of Business Administration from the Southern Cross University in Australia. Prior to accepting this role, he worked at ATS Pacific (Fiji) for six and a half years, first as Operations Manager and then as General Manager in Fiji. As part of his role, Leigh took the mantle and drove Tourism Fiji's efforts in the development and delivery of several initiatives to assist tourism industry stakeholders including in the events space, and key product experiences, and maintain a great relationship with both new and key industry stakeholders. His organization has worked in a business partnership with the Pacific Recycling Foundation in gaining attention from industry partners to encourage sustainable waste management practices. The event "Global Recycling Day 2023 symposium held at the Sheraton Golf Fiji Beach Resort last week, Mr Howard was one of the activist penal speakers. He was emotional as he recalled the hardship that they went through as a family where his dad took up a job as a waste picker.

"I grew up here in Fiji, my family experienced some very difficult times and we had to relocate back to Australia. We essentially lost everything that my parents had worked hard for many many years. We came to Australia with absolutely nothing. The very first job that my father took was a waste picker."

Mr Howard said he used to feel embarrassed to be seen in public with his dad "I remember I used to feel embarrassed of what my father did. I remember we didn't want to be seen in public with my dad." He said those childhood experiences challenged him to make a difference in a platform like Tourism Fiji.

"I remember in my hotel room I thought of what it feels like some of the people do in the communities. It really challenges me how I can make a difference in this arena and on this platform working for an organization like Tourism Fiji."

He added it was all about preservation. "I think the beauty of what recycling does is that it is a friendly reminder that activism isn't just celebrated in one day but it is a conviction for us to be able to make a change on a daily basis.

"I think for an organization like Tourism Fiji we have that conviction which is essentially to empower and challenge our industry to look after and preserve our natural environment so to ensure to speak what our brands means 'Where happiness comes naturally. We want our visitors and tourists to come to Fiji and believe wholeheartedly that happiness can be found,'" Mr Howard added.

²⁵ <https://www.pressreader.com/fiji/fiji-sun/20230325/281917367328340>

PM's recent social media post detailing his difficult journey gives hope and determination to many – Deo²⁶

Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka's recent post on Facebook detailing his difficult journey, particularly where he mentioned about collecting plastic bottles and that it was difficult but not impossible to live without a pension, gives hope and determination to many Fijians who collect recyclables from public places or dumpsites and also endure difficult and dangerous conditions with little to no protective equipment.

This was stated by the Founder of the Pacific Recycling Foundation, Amitesh Deo.

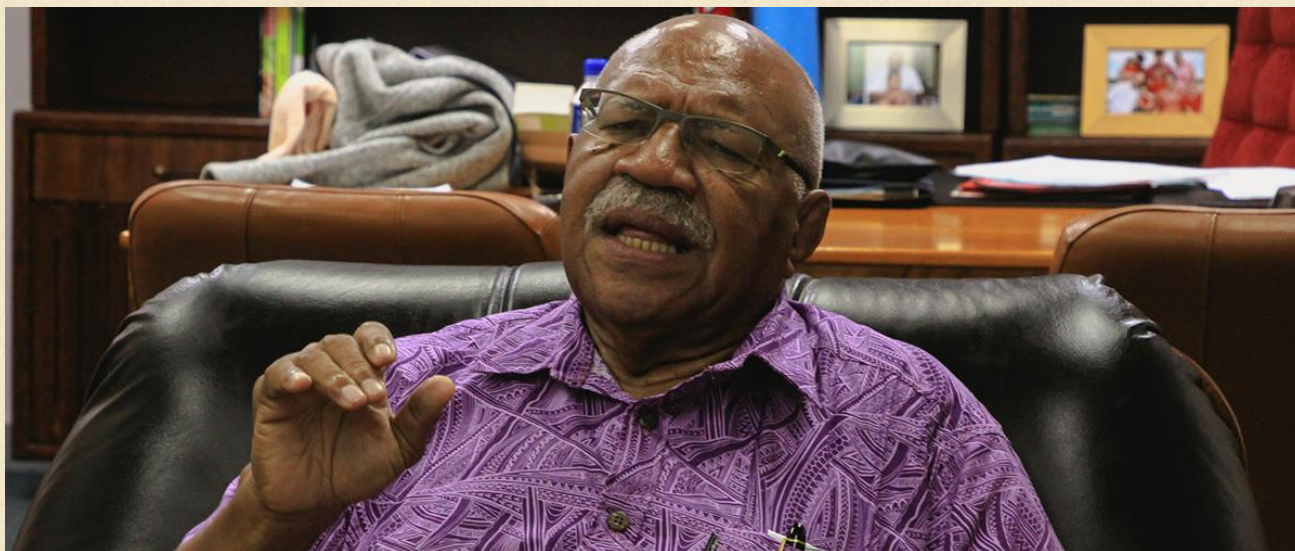
Deo says Rabuka's actions where he chose to collect plastic bottles during one of the most difficult periods of his life resonates very well with the work carried out by thousands of Fijians around the country who are involved in informal waste picking to generate income for their families.

He says the Prime Minister's decision to collect recyclables when he was finding ways to remain above water has sent a strong message to all the Collection Pillars of Recycling, formerly known as informal waste pickers, their work is relevant.

Deo also says those that collect recyclables to earn a living are often looked down upon, insulted, viewed as vagrants, face limitations in regulations to protect their work and sadly, go through difficulties to obtain basic healthcare and other services.

He further says Rabuka's action and his message also give hope to organisations like PRF and Waste Recyclers Fiji Limited who have been advocating for best practices of waste management and recycling.

Deo adds the need to recognise Collection Pillars of Recycling for the critical role they play in keeping our environment clean and moving them into the formal sector through green jobs.



²⁶ <https://www.fijivillage.com/news/PMs-recent-social-media-post-detailing-his-difficult-journey-gives-hope-and-determination-to-many---Deo-xrf845/>

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