

## WASTE MANAGEMENT: AN INDICATOR OF URBAN GOVERNANCE

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### Waste Management and Urban Governance

Waste management is one of the most visible of urban services. These services are a major employer and consume a large proportion of the operational revenue of a city or municipality. As such, effective and sustainable waste management goes hand-in-hand with good local governance and sound municipal management

Waste management is critical to the protection of public health, safety and the environment. In less developed countries it is also a key source of livelihood and social capital, particularly for the urban poor. Piles of waste left uncollected in the streets, blocking drainage channels or dumped in watercourses, are a major cause of public health risk, and uncontrolled disposal of waste can threaten water resources and place significant environmental health risks on those living nearby. Occupational health and safety risk to solid waste workers and waste pickers is also a major concern.

There is a great diversity in the nature and standards of waste management services within and between countries and different urban areas. Issues vary from country to country. Whereas in higher income countries attention is placed on maximising the recovery of resources from wastes, in poorer countries the focus is more on how to provide basic collection, treatment and disposal services to the growing urban population, and increase opportunities for income generation and productive employment. But all cities have one thing in common, that waste management is an issue of high public profile and growing importance.

Reflecting this, there is a strong case for viewing the state of waste management as an overall indicator of urban development and the sustainability of the city. Effective waste management requires a strategic, participatory approach that addresses social, financial and environmental as well as technical issues. Purely technocratic approaches are generally not successful, as they ignore issues of governance and urban management and development.

If waste services are to be effective, a city must have the capacity to manage finances and services in an effective and transparent manner, streamline management responsibilities and work effectively with communities.

Where waste management is working well, it is likely that the city has also tackled underlying issues relating to management structures, contracting procedures, labour practices, accounting, cost recovery and corruption. The adequacy of services to lower income communities also reflects on how successfully a city is dealing with issues urban poverty and equity. These linkages reinforce the potential for this sector to be a useful proxy indicator of good governance..

- Waste management issues relate to a wide range of aspects of urban governance
- Indicators can be used to identify weaknesses, set targets, measure performance, track achievements and guide future actions
- Waste management indicators are a tool which may be used by governments, research organisations and communities to affect positive changes

## Waste Management Indicators: Relevant Proxies For Urban Governance

To be meaningful, indicators require a firm foundation of data and information. Standardised methodologies for collecting data also provide a firm backbone for establishing and comparing trends, management systems and performance measures.

Measurement of overall urban governance is difficult without expending significant resources on data collection and assessment. A simpler option is to look at a single sector that embodies key aspects of urban development where it is possible to measure key indicators. The waste management sector presents an ideal opportunity for applying this concept, as it is a sector where information can be collected either through visual observation or more detailed field surveys, and be indirectly related to the overall state of urban municipal governance and management.

Waste is a particularly good reflection of the dynamic nature of cities. The quantity and nature of waste generated in a particular location varies daily and seasonally. It can also be possible to predict coming economic changes in a city through careful analysis of municipal wastes. However, because of the dynamic nature of waste, care must be taken to ensure data is relevant and accurate. Good and consistent working definitions of different types of wastes are critical factors in measuring and comparing performance.

- Municipal waste can be defined as those wastes generated from households and those wastes from institutional, commercial and industrial establishments similar in nature to household wastes.
- Information in support of waste management indicators can be collected by simple visual observation, from first hand community experiences and/or from more detailed field surveys

### Waste management indicators that can be used to measure aspects of urban governance

#### Primary Indicators

- Quantity of municipal waste (per capita, per household and/or in relation to GDP)
- Percentage of the urban population and percentage of low-income communities provided with regular waste collection services
- Percentage of waste disposed with effective control on health, safety and environmental impact
- Percentage of waste recycled and recovered.

#### Secondary Indicators

- Number of government agencies (at each level) with responsibility for waste management
- Total cost (or cost per tonne) of waste management services
- Percentage of total service costs recovered from generators of waste
- Percentage of waste management services carried out under defined service agreements
- Percentage of waste management services let to the private sector meeting criteria of transparency, accountability and competition
- Percentage of clinical and hazardous wastes treated to acceptable standards
- Number of successful enforcement actions against waste management offenders
- Degree of public/customer satisfaction
- Number of awareness raising events and percentage of population reached