



RESEARCH TITLE:

Untold Stories and Navigating the Just Transition of Informal Waste Pickers in Battambang’s Landfills and Dumpsites



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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Q1. What social, economic, and gender dynamics shape waste pickers' participation in Cambodia's informal waste sector?
- Q2. How do women, men, and marginalized groups experience risks, livelihoods, and working conditions within dumpsites and landfill systems?
- Q3. What policy and institutional actions are needed to enable safer livelihoods and support an inclusive, just transition in waste management?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

• **Phase 1 (2024) & Phase 2 (2025)**



Focus Group Discussions:
N=26 (10 Men and 16 Women)



In-depth interview:
N=28 (13 Men and 15 Women)



Key informants:
Ministries, Provincial and Municipal Authorities, Development Partners and NGOs, Private Sector



Field observation:
Landfill and Dumpsite

• **Location:** Battambang province



Tram Kream Landfill



Slaket Dumpsite



Consultation WS

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Informal waste pickers play a critical role in resource recovery, recycling, and environmental sustainability, yet their work often goes unrecognised in formal waste management systems. As Cambodia's waste sector evolves, understanding their livelihoods and challenges is essential to ensure they are not left behind. This research provides evidence to support a just transition that recognises and protects waste pickers while promoting inclusive and sustainable waste management.

RESEARCH KEY FINDINGS

- ♦ **Poverty-Driven Livelihoods & Income Insecurity:** Waste picking is a last-resort livelihood for households facing poverty, debt, and limited employment options. With monthly incomes of US\$40–250, many families rely on depot owners' cash advances and supplementary work just to cover daily expenses.
- ♦ **Living and Working Conditions** Landfill workers receive basic accommodation and free electricity but lack clean water. Slaket dumpsite workers live in scrap-material shelters on-site, with some NGO support. Adequate sanitation and safe housing remain unmet needs across both sites.
- ♦ **Safety Risks, Gender, and Household Burdens**
 - Waste pickers face serious hazards, yet protective equipment is largely self-financed and inconsistently used.
 - Women bear a disproportionate burden of waste picking, household chores, and caregiving, with limited childcare often forcing young children onto hazardous worksites, and face heightened personal safety concerns. Drug use at Slaket dumpsite further compounds community tensions and security risks.
- ♦ **Gaps in Social Protection and Social Security:** While most waste pickers benefit from ID Poor-supported healthcare services, access to broader social protection remains limited. Low awareness of available programs and the cost of self-financed NSSF contributions prevent many workers from accessing social security coverage.
- ♦ **Limited Access to Skills Development:** Most waste pickers have limited awareness of TVET opportunities, while those interested in vocational training often face information and accessibility barriers that constrain participation.
- ♦ **Training Gaps and Financial Exclusion:** Vocational programs rarely cover recycling or green jobs, limiting opportunities to formalise skills and access employment pathways. Limited access to credit further prevents waste pickers from investing in alternative livelihoods and transitioning out of the sector.

Two terms:

- ♦ **Landfill (Sanitary Landfill):** A waste disposal site designed, constructed, operated, and maintained in accordance with engineering and environmental standards to contain waste and control potential adverse impacts on human health and the environment (WB, 20222 & MoE).
- ♦ **Dumpsite (Open Dumpsite or Uncontrolled Landfill):** A waste disposal site where solid waste is disposed of in an unregulated manner, without following the principles of sanitary landfill (WB, 2022)

KEY DISCUSSIONS & POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- ♦ **The "Unseen Green Job" Paradox:** Waste pickers provide essential environmental services yet remain excluded from formal municipal planning and the city's green agenda.
- ♦ **Navigating a Just Transition:** Modernising waste infrastructure threatens informal livelihoods. A just transition must go beyond infrastructure to prioritise social equity and formal worker integration.
- ♦ **Formalisation and Social Protection:** Legal recognition through waste picker cooperatives would enable collective bargaining and access to NSSF and broader social protection schemes.
- ♦ **Pathways for Mobility:** A gap in relevant TVET programs, combined with low awareness of existing government schemes, limits workers' ability to transition out of the sector.
- ♦ **Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration:** Achieving a sustainable urban future in Battambang requires stronger collaboration between authorities, NGOs, and the private sector to ensure waste pickers are recognised, protected, and formally included.