



# Tools to support community transformation

## A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – INFORMATION FOR FACILITATORS

Tools in this section of *Reveal* provide background information on hidden issues for facilitators. Tools in other sections are designed to be used with communities.

# Revealing the problem of waste: information for facilitators

### Questions for a facilitator to consider:

What things are considered waste (rubbish/garbage) in your community?

What happens to the things people no longer want or need? How is rubbish/garbage disposed of?

Is plastic waste a nuisance in your community? What other waste products do you see lying around?

Who is involved in collecting, sorting and transporting waste? How are these people treated? *(This question may be more relevant for urban than for rural contexts.)*

Most of us produce rubbish. We may often just throw it away, without thinking much about it. But waste is an increasing problem in many communities. When there is no safe and effective system to manage waste, it collects around houses, on streets, in drains, and on informal dumping sites. It impacts people's health and dignity, and damages the environment.



However, there is often value in what people think of as 'waste'. Much of what people throw away can be reused or recycled. People can develop businesses and earn sustainable incomes from products that are no longer wanted.

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## A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – REVEALING THE PROBLEM OF WASTE

In many urban communities some recycling and reuse of products already happens. Informal waste pickers (sometimes called ‘scavengers’) do a very important job of sorting through waste, and finding things of value for reuse or recycling. Often, however, they work in dangerous conditions, get paid very little, and face stigma and discrimination. Sadly, many children are involved in this type of work.

In many communities, people may not understand the problems of uncontrolled waste nor the potential worth of waste. They may also not understand the unfair way in which informal waste pickers are treated. In this way, waste is a ‘hidden issue’ that needs to be revealed.



### Explaining the words we use

**Consumption** - the things that people buy and use

**Discrimination** - when people are treated differently and unfairly because of something particular (for example, their sex, age, disability or job)

**E-waste / Electronic waste** - electrical or electronic devices that people no longer want

**Pollution** - when land, air or water are made dirty and unsafe by harmful actions or processes

**Recycling** - processing used or waste products, so that they become reusable

**Stigma** - negative and often uninformed beliefs that a society or group of people have about something

**Waste** - things that people no longer want or need. Sometimes called garbage or rubbish

### What does the Bible say?

God created the world and saw that all that he had made was “very good” (Genesis 1). The Bible is clear that God cares deeply about his creation, and he has given human beings the important role of caring for the earth (Genesis 1:28). Being made in God’s image means that we should rule as He would. This includes using the earth’s resources carefully and wisely, and caring for wildlife and the natural environment.

The Bible is also clear that every person is loved by God, and precious in his sight. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made, in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). Jesus came so that we might have life, and life in all its fullness (John 10:10). This includes working and living in dignity and safety. The working conditions that many informal waste pickers face, and the stigma and prejudice they experience, is wrong. Christians should be leading efforts to improve their working conditions, and to fight against stigma and discrimination. We are to work towards communities where there is no discrimination, and everyone is given the opportunity to play a role that fulfils their potential and enables them to flourish. For Bible studies on this issue, please see **Section B** of *Reveal*.

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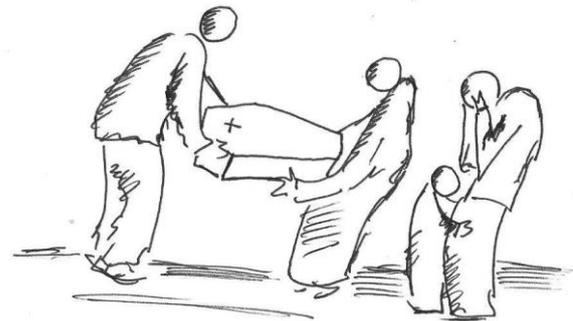
## A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – REVEALING THE PROBLEM OF WASTE

## Understanding waste

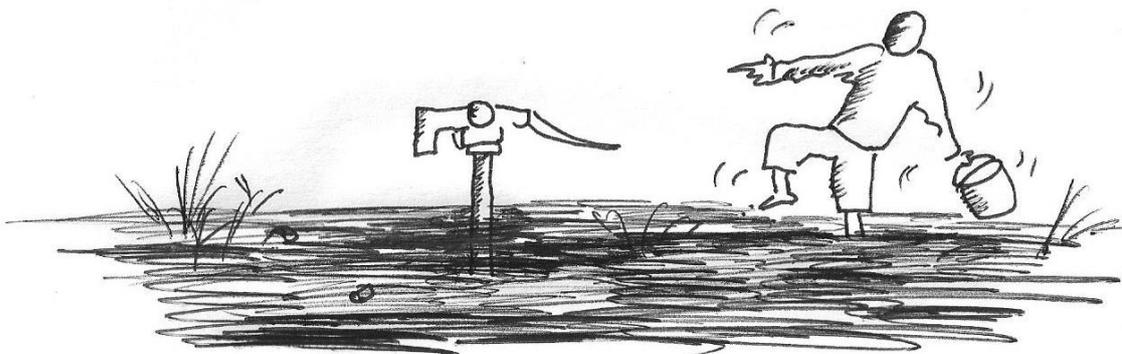
The amount of waste being produced by communities across the world is increasing. There are several reasons for this:

- population growth - more people means more waste!
- increasing migration from rural to urban areas. As more people live in overcrowded urban settlements, waste becomes a bigger problem. In urban areas, people also have more access to packaged goods (for example, they may buy drinking water in plastic bottles or bags, rather than filter it themselves. Food in urban areas is also more likely to be bought with packaging on it than in rural areas. This packaging then becomes waste. In many urban contexts the infrastructure and services provided by local authorities to deal with waste is unable (and is not being scaled up) to deal with the increased quantity of waste from increased numbers of people.
- the amount of things that people buy and use (“consumption”) is increasing in many places.

Waste is problematic for a number of reasons. When it is not properly collected and managed, it can pollute land, air and water sources. It causes ill health, for example, it can lead to stomach and respiratory infections, particularly in children. Around nine million people die every year of diseases linked to the mismanagement of waste and pollutants, 20 times more than die from malaria.<sup>1</sup>



Waste blocks drains, which can exacerbate the spread of cholera, dengue fever and other infectious diseases. Blocked drains also cause flooding, which damages property and buildings, and can put lives in danger.



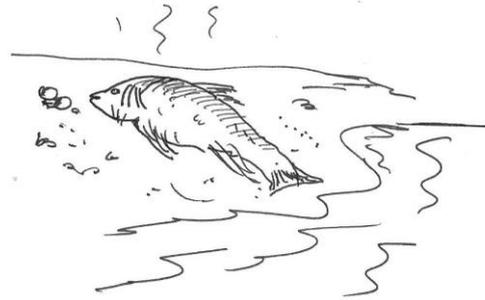
<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Tearfund (2017) Why advocacy on waste and a circular economy

## A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – REVEALING THE PROBLEM OF WASTE



Waste is causing harm to animals and birds who swallow or become entangled in rubbish.

Large amounts of plastic waste enters the sea, and there is increasing evidence that this is broken down into small pieces, absorbed by fish and microscopic animals and enters the food chain. Once in the foodchain, it is consumed by human beings, the impact of which is not yet fully known.



As waste is rotting, methane gas is released. This contributes towards climate change (see **Tool A1: Revealing climate change**).

Some kinds of rubbish are more dangerous than others. Dangerous rubbish is called *hazardous waste*. This includes chemical rubbish such as batteries, cleaning liquids and insecticides. Medical waste, such as needles, syringes, old medicines and soiled bandages can also be very dangerous. Electronic waste (or 'e-waste') is also particularly harmful to health and the environment, and is a growing problem in developing countries. E-waste contains harmful substances such as lead and mercury which can, for example, affect fertility and child development, and increase the risk of cancer.

For more information on different types of hazardous waste, see **Footsteps 59**, pages 2-3

In many places, damaging ways of dealing with waste are used. Sometimes rubbish is **dumped into rivers and lakes** and pollutes the water. Often rubbish is **buried in the ground**. If proper guidelines are not followed, buried rubbish may contain harmful substances that leak into the soil and pollute the water supply. Some communities may use **open burning** to try to deal with their waste. This, however, pollutes the air and the ashes are often toxic.



See **Tool C2: Managing household waste** for advice on appropriate methods of dealing with waste.

## A1 HIDDEN ISSUES – REVEALING THE PROBLEM OF WASTE

In urban areas, waste may be dumped in **uncontrolled dumpsites**, where informal waste pickers sort through the waste to try to find things of value. This work is often dangerous, and the workers often get little pay. Uncontrolled dumpsites, and in particular the mixing of hazardous and other wastes, can cause disease in nearby settlements as well as among waste workers. They also cause high levels of land and water pollution.



In addition to these problems caused by waste, every time something is thrown away, we are in effect throwing away the materials, energy and water used in making that thing in the first place. This is not good stewardship of the earth's resources. The amount of waste we produce in the first place needs to be reduced.

### Using Reveal

There are activities to help a community begin to recognise and address problems of waste in **Section A1**. **Section B** includes Bible studies on environmental issues, and **Section C2** includes tools on composting, how to manage household waste and related areas.



### Finding out more

- Tearfund (2017) Why advocate on waste and a circular economy  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/policy\\_and\\_research/sustainable\\_economics/the\\_circular\\_economy/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/policy_and_research/sustainable_economics/the_circular_economy/)
- Tearfund (2004) Footsteps 59 - Pollution  
[http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps\\_51-60/footsteps\\_59/](http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/footsteps/footsteps_51-60/footsteps_59/)

#### Related tools:

- A1 – Revealing environmental degradation: information for facilitators [A1: Climate & environment-2]
- A2 – Slides and ladders – helping or harming the environment? [A2: Climate & environment-3]
- A2 – How is our environment changing? [A2: Climate & environment-5]
- A2 – Mapping our past, present and future environments [A2: Climate & environment-6]
- B – Caring for God's world (Bible study) [B: Climate & environment-2]
- B – Caring for our environment (Bible study) [B: Climate & environment-3]
- C2 – Composting [C2: Climate & environment-4]
- C2 – Managing household waste [C2: Climate & environment-4]

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