



GreenCape



Collaboration between business and government to support recycling in informal and low-income settlements

Polyco, Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality,
Eastern Cape

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Background & purpose

Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality (Buffalo City) was established as a metropole in 2011. It is an important industrial hub in South Africa. Growth of the circular economy presents an opportunity for economic development for the municipality.

Buffalo City covers the largest area by size (2,750km²), and has the second lowest population density of any of the metropolitan municipalities in South Africa (304 people per km²). The City consists of 72.5% formal housing, but only 70.4% of all households (formal and informal) receive regular (weekly) refuse removal.

The low population density provides a challenge for the provision of services. Currently, waste management is primarily focused on collection and disposal, with little or no municipality-driven initiatives for separation at source and recycling.

In order to alleviate some of the socio-economic and service delivery challenges in the municipality, Buffalo City is investigating opportunities for growing the recycling economy, improving waste management service delivery and increasing diversion from landfill.

This case study focuses on how collaboration between government and industry has facilitated the establishment of buyback centres/drop offs in the municipality, stimulating recycling and providing new income opportunities.

It is written for:

- Public officials at national and regional level tasked with enabling the integration of waste pickers into formal waste management systems.
- Decision makers in consumer goods value chains and specifically those responsible for extended producer responsibility (EPR) and corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- Officials at local government level specifically tasked with integrating waste pickers into waste management systems at a municipal level.
- Community-based organisations and other non-governmental organisations with an interest in improving livelihoods in informal and low-income communities.



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The Challenges

Buffalo City has very few waste diversion activities driven by the public sector. The Call-2-Action Initiative (launched in 2016 by businesses in the city and led by the Border-Kei Chamber of Business) included waste management activities in their aim to improve living conditions in the city, although much of the focus was on litter cleaning and beautifying, with four sites for recycling also identified.

At the time, Buffalo City had no operational public drop-off facilities and the bulk of the waste generated in the municipality was going to landfill. Some of the challenges that hampered the establishment of recycling facilities in the municipality were:



- Availability of land;



- lack of infrastructure for recycling,



- capacity within the municipality for operation of a drop-off/recycling facility



- limited understanding of the economic viability of recycling operations.



Sorting of recyclables at buyback centres

3 The Solutions

In 2021, the non-profit company Polyco, a plastic focused producer responsibility organisation (PRO), agreed to partner with Buffalo City and the Border-Kei Chamber of Business to implement a solution that would improve the collection of recyclables, and increase the recycling capacity in Buffalo City.

The Buffalo City Development Agency, Border Kei Chamber of Business and Polyco partnered to pilot the establishment of hybrid drop-off and buyback centre operations at four sites:

1

SETTLERS WAY

2

SOUTHERNWOOD

3

OXFORD STREET

4

QUIGNEY



Sorting of recyclables

Each partner undertook a unique role to ensure that the project could be implemented:

- Buffalo City provided the land and civil engineering contract to establish the buyback centres/drop-offs,
- the Border-Kei Chamber of Business contracted with the municipality to operate the buyback centres/drop-offs, and
- Polyco funded the infrastructure needed for the facilities to operate (shipping containers, cages, bins, trolleys/trikes, scales, tablets, software, solar power and branding) and appointed a waste management service provider to operate the site.

The hybrid model consists of the drop-off, where the facility is open to accept material from the community (including businesses) for free, as well as a buyback centre, where waste reclaimers can bring material to the facility, where the material gets weighed, and the reclaimers are reimbursed through a cashless method (WeighPay – a web-based app developed by Polyco). The WeighPay app generates a code/voucher, which can be used (or cashed out) at a number of vendors, including Shoprite/Checkers, U-Save, Boxer, Pick 'n Pay and Debonairs.

Coupled to the establishment of the buyback centre/drop-off is a media campaign that introduces the facilities to the citizens and the provision of dedicated recycling bins in key areas where people aggregate. These dedicated recycling bins are serviced by a waste picker associated to the buyback centre/drop-off whose responsibility is also to engage with the public on the benefits of separating recyclables at source, i.e., recyclables in the right place equal jobs/income opportunities.

Unfortunately, due to challenges, one being COVID-19, the project was delayed from being rolled out in 2020. To date, only the Southernwood and Commercial Road facilities have been established, but the plan remains in place to use the learnings in order to establish similar facilities at the other two sites identified.



Waste reclaimers scour a landfill for recyclables

3 Impact/outcome

The project has already started to show benefits for reclaimers, the community and the Buffalo City Municipality although having only operated for just over 6 months from September 2021. In particular, this model allows the municipality to provide drop off sites for both recyclable materials and other waste materials, and at the same time reducing the distance that reclaimers need to travel by providing a (closer) option for waste reclaimers to sell their material.

Benefits to community/reclaimers

- Southernwood - operates in a high volume, densely populated area, and diverted an average of 20 tonnes per month between October-December 2021, and the Commercial Road site diverted an average of 8 tonnes per month over the same period.
- 10 jobs were created across the 2 sites.
- Safer transactions (voucher system versus cash).

Social and environmental benefits

- Education and awareness programmes for the local community.
- Diversion of materials from landfill.
- Cleaner living environment.
- Reduction pollution of storm water systems and rivers.

Benefits to businesses

- Diversion of packaging from landfill.
- Extended producer responsibility: contribution to diversion targets for companies and PROs.
- Demonstration of a potentially replicable model for extended producer responsibility.
- Reduced environmental degradation.
- Visible and impactful corporate social responsibility.

Benefits to municipality

- Landfill airspace savings.
- Additional savings in cleaning up dumping sites and transport of dumped waste to landfill.
- Contribution to improved service delivery and waste diversion targets.

Lesson learned and future plans

The collaboration between Buffalo City, Border-Kei Chamber of Business and Polyco is an example of how a business-led project can be used to address some of the recycling and waste management challenges in a municipality. With many areas facing basic waste management challenges, this model enables reclaimers (and the community) to bring recyclable as well as other waste material to the site, where all waste material can be dropped off at no cost.

Lessons learned from the piloting of this model include:

- Contracting with municipalities can be challenging and can increase the time needed to implement the project. This project benefited from an existing partner (in this case a chamber of commerce (the Border-Kei Chamber of Business) already having a partnership with the municipality, resulting in an easier contractual process for land from the municipality. This unlocked some of the red tape associated with getting access to land.
- Contrasting dynamics of the two sites have provided insight on site location and viability, particularly the minimum volume of recyclables required for a viable business case being around the range of 10 tonnes per month.
- Clarity on responsibilities, and local dynamics:
 - Security was an issue at one of the sites. Following theft and vandalism of infrastructure and equipment, and an additional cost of doing business was incurred for provision of security;
 - Understanding each other's processes, as this can lead to significant delays if not accounted for.
- It is important to be clear whether the facility will need to be viable as a business or as a service delivery mechanism. Business viability will entail the ability of the facility to operate with no external (financial) support, whereas service delivery viability will include some form of remuneration from the municipality (or other stakeholder). This decision will depend on the contract being signed with the waste management service provider, and who is responsible for any additional costs.



Bundled recyclables



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