



Building livelihoods from waste: Informal waste recycling in Vrygrond

A Buyback Centre's Journey Vrygrond, Cape Town

A buyback centre in Vrygrond diverts ~1500 tonnes of waste from landfill annually, providing annual income of between R950 000 and R1.9 million to the community.

Background and Purpose

Vrygrond, an informal settlement in the City of Cape Town (CCT), is reputedly the oldest one in the Western Cape Province (Living Hope, 2020). It is characterised by a high rate of unemployment and illegal dumping; the latter possibly owing to its close proximity to the Coastal Park Landfill. As such, informal recycling provides a respite to these challenges, with buyback centres being instrumental in providing income from the sale of collected recyclables.

This case study focuses on the role of the informal recycling sector and buyback centres in supporting the livelihoods of those residing in the Vrygrond informal settlement.

Challenge

Operating a buyback centre is not without its challenges, and in Vrygrond the challenges faced include access to land, lack of business development support, and access to resources that allow for the expansion of operations (i.e. access to balers, vehicles, fixed infrastructure).

Additionally, due to the informal nature of the Vrygrond area, provision of services such as waste management is difficult to manage from a municipal perspective. Coupled with this, the Coastal Park Landfill is nearing its end of life with a reported eight years of airspace remaining as of 2016 (False Bay Echo, 2016).

Tackling the challenges

A community entrepreneur setup a buyback centre, which employs 20 people (approximately 60% female and 40% male) and provides income opportunities to 300 waste reclaimers from the Vrygrond area. The buyback centre also indirectly contributes to reduction of the the impact of illegal waste disposal and reduces disposal of inherently valuable resources to landfill. Unlike many buyback centres, this buyback centre is not solely focused on market forces and will take in all materials in order to support the livelihoods of the waste reclaimers.





Lessons learned and future plans

This approach demonstrates the value of a community-based recycling scheme, providing an income source to communities that would otherwise not have access to income, while simultaneously having a positive environmental outcome. The model further illustrates a solution that the CCT can consider when addressing waste management in informal areas.

There is, however, a strong need for formalising the engagement between the sector and the municipality, with successful interventions demonstrated in the Breede Valley, Drakenstein, Overstrand, Stellenbosch and Theewaterskloof.

It is recommended that buyback centres be assisted in readying themselves for engagement with (CCT) municipal procurement processes for services in order to:

- expand and provide services where the municipality has limited access;
- ensure that buyback centres are responsive to calls for services from the municipality;

As Producer Responsibility Organisations (PRO's) also assist BBC's with resources, three-way collaboration between municipalities, PRO's and BBC's can enable more efficient use of these resources, and reduce any potential duplication of efforts.

The benefit of collaborating with buyback centres in integration projects or programmes is that they have existing relationships with, and an understanding of, the local informal recyclables collection sector. In addition, the buyback centres are access points through which reclaimers may be engaged, offered resources, and valued in the recycling industry (eg from the Draft Waste Picker Integration Guideline, is the proposed payment of a base service fee to reclaimers selling material to registered BBCs).

Business benefits

The business diverts ~130 tonnes of waste from landfill every month (1 500 tonnes per year), providing income of between R950 000 and R1.9 million to the community annually while saving landfill costs of R875 000 per annum.¹

The detailed benefits from the buyback centre include:

Distributed to waste reclaimers daily		R3 500-R7 000
Monthly waste diversion of:		
Paper	30 tonnes	
Plastic	60 tonnes	
Metal	12 tonnes	
Glass	28 tonnes	

The combined efficiency of the waste reclaimers and buyback centres is demonstrated by the disposal of less than two tonnes per month (or less than 1.5% of incoming material). The buyback centre derives its operating income from selling sorted recyclables to bigger buyback centres within Cape Town.

¹ Based on City of Cape Town 2019-20 tariff of R583.90 per tonne for landfilling of waste

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References

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2. Living Hope. (2020). Living Hope. Retrieved 2020, from <http://www.livinghope.co.za/about/communities/capricorn/>
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