We cash, on your trash

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A scavenger is someone who searches for or finds useable objects at no cost, especially among waste. This is an innocuous definition. However, when one talks about scavengers, some show sympathy, some squirm, but most act righteously. How should we accommodate scavengers? They are found at waste sites, in most parts of the world, specially in developing countries. In developing countries scavenging is a reality. We cannot wish them away. Is the dump environment any worse than conditions in some of the towns or settlements in developing countries? Some of the reasons for not wanting scavengers at landfill sites are:

- Exposure of people to diseases.
- Danger of people being injured by the machine working at the site.
- Death from eating contaminated food.
- Disruption of disposal operations.
- Moral guilt of people and governments.

At the 20th WEDC Conference a paper was presented on waste management carried out in an area embracing 4 towns. Seven existing uncontrolled dumping grounds were gradually transformed into 4 fully managed landfill sites, including 2 transfer stations and one parkland. Cursory mention of scavengers and scavenging at these sites was made. This paper is a record of observations from March 1994 to February 1997 of the landfills and the effect of the scavengers at these sites. In the process of upgrading the landfills, the need to adhere to the government regulations, which are becoming more and more stringent, and the presence of people at the landfill sites was considered with great concern. These people have been at the sites for several years extracting saleable items and making a living. On one hand the landfill has to satisfy the regulations, which does not encourage scavenging at landfills. On the other hand the moral obligation towards scavengers has to be considered. Stopping them would cut off their livelihood. This could turn them towards anti-social acts and crime, which is increasing in the country. Ignoring their presence would worsen their poor situation. To keep within the regulations all the technical requirements were adhered to. However, when it came to addressing the presence of scavengers (or salvagers as we prefer to call them) the following was carried out:

- A leader was identified among the group. He was to keep order among them and act as spokesman with the site operator and to organise collection of wind blown items.
- Clean drinking water and toilet facilities were provided.
- Action was taken to provide health care to the salvagers and schooling for children at the sites. A mobile clinic visits the site once a week. A hut has been provided to be used as a class room. A catholic mission provides a teacher twice a week to teach both children and adults.
- Local welfare bodies have been requested to provide upliftment assistance.

### Transfer station at Mabopane

The existing 9 hectare waste site was a discarded quarry which was used for dumping without any proper management. It had to be closed as it had reached its capacity. Further it was polluting the river running alongside, and housing development had come close to the site. As there was no suitable area at Mabopane for a new waste site, an acceptable solution was to transfer the waste to the Ga-Rankuwa landfill. The Mabopane site was transformed into a parkland, the river protected from pollution and a transfer station built. The total cost was R2,317,876.00.

Uncompacted waste is delivered to the transfer station by numerous vehicles which vary in size and loading. The site operator maintains daily records of waste volume brought to the site. The records of waste delivered to, and transferred from the site, for a period of 36 months showed:

- Total waste delivered to transfer station = 159,480 m³ (before salvaging)
- Waste transferred to Ga-rankuwa landfill = 95,400 m³ (after salvaging)

The ratio of transferred waste to delivered waste was 60%.

Therefore the loose volume as delivered to Mabopane is being reduced by 40% due to extraction of recyclable materials by the salvagers. The items retrieved from the waste are collected regularly by outside agents for which the salvagers are paid spot cash. Therefore no transport costs are incurred by salvagers. The average income of a group of two from sale of the salvaged items per month is as follows:

- Metal Cans R 300, Plastic R 80, Cardboard R 90, Glass R 10, a total of R 480.

Some local market rates as at July 1997:
Glass hardly features in the above analysis, not because of payment rate, but because only small volumes are salvageable.

- 55,000 Aluminium cans = 1 Tonne
- 25,000 Steel cans = 1 Tonne

There are 140 people at this transfer station who cash (140/2 x 480) R 33,600 from (159 480/36) 4430 m³ of trash per month.

**Cost saving by salvagers**

The actual cost of this operation for 36 months from March 1994 to February 1997 is as follows:

Operational cost = R 2 284 384
Escalation for the period = R 257 640
Value added tax (VAT) = R 355 884

**Total Cost** = R 2 897 908

i. e. R 80 500/ month
Waste delivered = 4430 m³/month
Waste transported = 2650 m³/month
Amount extracted = 1780 m³/month

The handling and transporting cost for uncompacted waste volume of 2650 m³ is R 80 500.

**Cost saving due to volume reduction per month** = 80 500 x 1780 / 2650 = R 54,071

This is due to reduction in disposal machine hours and reduced road transport costs.

**GA Rankuwa waste disposal site**

The waste site is an active quarry. The worked out area has been used to dump waste without proper management. The cost of upgrading the site to an acceptable landfill was R 394,609. The waste stream is similar to that at Mabopane transfer station and it could be assumed that this site also enjoys a 40% reduction of waste by volume by the 70 people present at site. Each group of two earns R 480/month.

Earnings by scavengers/month
R 70/2 x 480 = R 16, 800.
SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT: RATNAM

Total =10033 m³ 
Therefore the compacted waste volume would be 
60% x 10033 = 6020 m³ 
Cover material would be 
20% x 6020 = 1204 m³ 
Total = 7224 m³ 
The current rate of deposition is 4472 m³ per month of 
Waste plus cover material 
The average cost of providing 1 m³ of air space is about R 10.00 (in soft material) 

Therefore the cost saving due to reduction of air space 
(7224 - 4472) = 2752 m³ x R 10. 
= R 27520 / month 

Air space reduction has increased life span of the landfill by 
7224/ 4472 = 1.62 times i.e. 62% 

Total volume extracted by salvagers from waste to Ga- 
rankuwa landfill site 
At Mabopane = 1780 m³ 
At Morutlungs = 533 m³ 
At Ga Rankuwa residential = 1308 m³ 
At Ga-Rankuwa Industrial = 200 m³ 
Total = 3821 m³ 
The effective operational cost saving at this site is 
55440 x 3821 / 1323 = R 34101 

Kudube waste disposal site 
This started as an intended waste disposal site. It was based 
ons the classical trench system. The disposal was disorganised 
and un- managed with burning of incoming waste and 
irregular compaction and covering. The cost of upgrading 
the site was R 413,537.00 

Here a group of 50 people carry out salvaging in a 
disciplined manner under the control of the landfill operator. 
Their salvaged goods are safely stored inside the security 
fence of the site. The extraction and earning are similar to 
the other sites as described above. Earnings of salvagers per 
month = 50/2 x R 480 = R 12 000 
The delivery of waste to site was recorded for 40 months 
which showed that at the start the site received 6000 m³ of 
loose waste. This reduced to 3100 m³ loose waste within 
the first four months of operation And in the next five 
months to 2200 m³ per month. This could be that initially 
Waste accumulated in the town was brought in. 

Cost saving by salvagers 
Loose waste per month = 2205 m³ 
Extracted by salvagers = 882 m³ 
Loose waste to be compacted = 1323 m³ 

Actual cost of this operation for 36 months from March 
1994 to February 1997 is as follows: 
Operational cost = R 1 098 460 
Escalation for this period = R 123 888 
VAT = R 171 292 
Total = R 1 393 477 
i.e R 38 708/month 
Handling and compacting cost for loose waste volume of 
1323 m³ is R 38 708 per month 

Cost saving due to Volume reduction 
= R 38 708 x 882/1323 = R 25805/month 

If there were no salvagers the volume of waste and cover 
material compacted would be : 
Compacted waste 60% x 2205 = 1323 m³ 
Cover material 20% x 1323 = 265 m³ 
Total = 1588 m³ 
Actual waste compacted 0.6 x 1323 = 794 m³ 
Cover material compacted 0.2 x 794= 159 m³ 
Total compacted = 953 m³ 
Savings due to air space reduction (1588 - 953) 
= 635 x 10. = R 6350. 

Increase in life span of landfill due to reduction of air space 
is 1588/953 =1.67 times i.e 67% 

In addition to normal waste, food from a nearby luxury 
hotel/gambling resort including numerous restaurants and 
fast food outlets are brought to the landfill. Upon 
investigation it was found this food was rarely “ older ” 
than 8 to 12 hours, and consequently had not deteriorated 
into a health hazard. However the food comes mixed with 
other items and was dumped with the rest of the waste. The 
luxury hotel was contacted to separate the food from the 
rest. This they complied with. Further, the food is separated 
before disposal and the leader is responsible for orderly 
distribution. 

The saving at Ga-rankuwa and Kudube landfills are due 
to: 
• Reduced machine hours. 
• Reduction in volume of cover material. 
• Reduction in landfill volume. 

The effect of salvagers on the landfill/transfer stations is 
shown in the table below. It could be concluded that in 
developing countries having salvagers at landfill sites is an 
advantage. However, it is important that they become part 
of the operation and their welfare is looked after. As in this 
instance there has not been an accident and the people are 
happier than before upgrading the operations of waste 
management. 

Table 2. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Earnings by salvagers</th>
<th>Savings to Due Reduced Waste Volume</th>
<th>Savings Due to Reduced Airspace of Landfills</th>
<th>Life Extension of Landfills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mabopane</td>
<td>33600</td>
<td>54000</td>
<td>27520</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ga rankuwa</td>
<td>16800</td>
<td>13458</td>
<td>27520</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kudube</td>
<td>12000</td>
<td>25805</td>
<td>6350</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is a duty of the owners of the landfill to improve the conditions under which the salvagers work such as providing facilities like drinking water, toilets, health care and education. The local councils should encourage recycling entrepreneurs to have a contract with the salvagers and could then be requested to provide better working conditions such as providing protective clothing, boots, masks and others facilities including health education. Where possible government should assist to deploy them elsewhere.

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