

Women Waste Workers for Wala Usik
Co-Designing a Circular Economy

Impact Report

on the Circular Economic
Empowerment Fund



The Incubation
Network Presents

EQUALITY
in PLASTICS
CIRCULARITY

February 2023
Talisay City, Philippines

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Women Waste Workers for Wala Usik: Co-Designing a Circular Economy or WOW Wala Usik was a short-term project (Nov 2021–Nov 2022) that aimed to increase awareness and inspire action toward gender-responsive waste management programs by the City Government of Talisay in Negros Occidental in the Philippines and their partners, towards building a circular economy. The project provided opportunities for diverse stakeholders involved in solid waste management (SWM), especially focused on female informal waste workers (waste pickers, street cleaners, junk collectors), the local government in charge of SWM programs and policies, and local civil society organizations and enterprises aligned with circular economy principles and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation, Inc (PRRCFI) was motivated to carry out this project because of the momentum it started in 2018 with the homegrown movement for 'Wala Usik' – a native phrase used as a cultural reminder to 'not waste anything', and to honor the value of materials produced and consumed. In the past 4 years, PRRCFI helped put into place key partnerships for this movement in Negros Island. These have produced valuable prototypes of innovative solutions and knowledge products for waste management and circular economy.

The **WOW Wala Usik** project further supported the Wala Usik movement by achieving these objectives:

1. Raise awareness of gender inequalities and human rights issues in waste management and recycling systems, highlight practical approaches to improving gender sensitivity and responsiveness, and demonstrate the potential impacts of such approaches.
2. Generate and scale innovative solutions to issues in waste management and recycling systems that also empower women and girls by valuing them as key stakeholders, thus increasing their access to and control over resources;
3. Create opportunities for civil society organizations, particularly those that represent waste workers and women's rights, to influence decision-making in waste management and recycling systems.



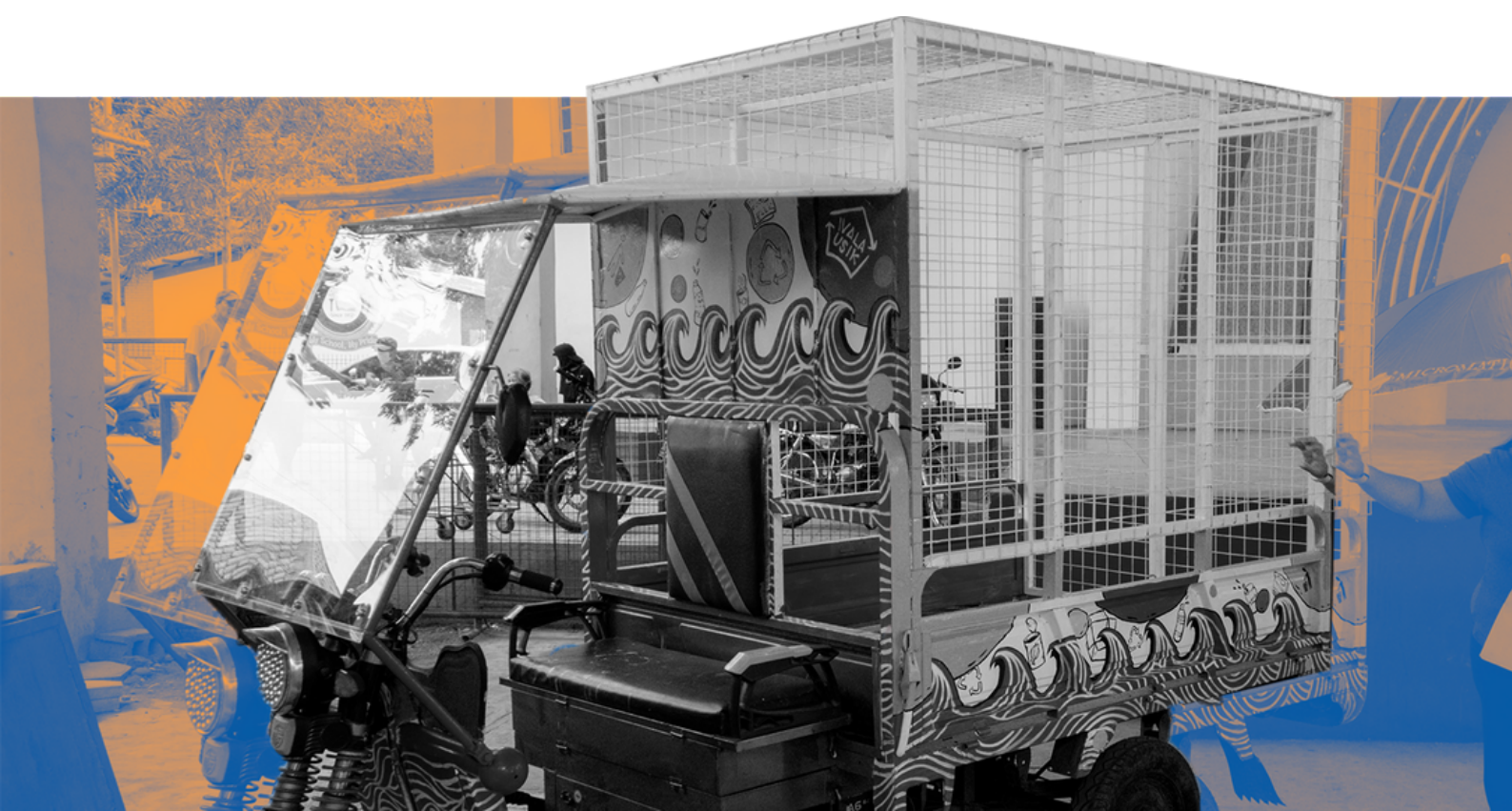
ABOUT THE CIRCULAR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FUND

In developing countries, including the Philippines, the waste management sector has a high percentage of female participation; it is however limited to informal work and unregulated employment. Health risks in this sector are exacerbated by gender inequalities, as waste management equipment is often designed for men and women have additional physical safety challenges on top of the usually associated health risks to waste workers. Further, women tend to be more negatively affected by pollution because of social norms, under which certain roles such as waste management falls under household tasks which are mainly assigned to women.

As part of its efforts to generate support for women and men informal waste workers who provide essential frontline services to the community, the project established a *Circular Economic Empowerment Fund* or CEEF to fund practical solutions born out of waste workers' collaboration with stakeholders from local governments, the academe, and the private sector which was facilitated through a design thinking process, where empathy is the first step to identify aspects of women waste workers' jobs that can be improved. After a few iterations of various solutions, two final designs were selected for prototyping through the CEEF: three (3) units of a customised *kariton* to collect and segregate waste, and one (1) electric mobile junkshop serving ten (10) localities or communities.

The customized *kariton* is a pushcart with an umbrella, hooked sacks as containers for recyclables, waste bins, and a compartment for extra storage. The design promotes ease of use, as the cart is lightweight and easy to maneuver. This innovation aims to make it more convenient for street waste collectors, particularly women, to go around with different containers for each waste category: recyclable, residual, and compostable.





The e-mobile junkshop is a vehicle that waste workers can use to go around Talisay City to collect recyclables and load up to 250kg of materials on it. They can gather recyclables such as plastic bottles, hard plastic, bottles, tin cans, newspapers, cardboard, special metals, and the like.

All of the waste workers who have used/are using these innovations have provided positive feedback: for some, it has reduced their work hours or made their work easier/faster. Others shared that they feel safer handling waste such as broken glass and other sharp materials. Those who have used the e-mobile junkshop reported savings in transportation costs as their only option in the past was to rent vehicles to collect recyclable materials; now, they only need to pay a minimal electric charging fee. Many also shared that they feel more confident and that the innovations, along with the personal protective equipment they received, have given them a greater sense of dignity and pride as they go about their work.



While the CEEF was only able to fund two waste innovations, it demonstrated some best practices for the city government to adopt. First, it was important that the CEEF support locally-determined solutions co-designed through an inclusive and participatory process that engaged both women and men stakeholders; this was facilitated by the design thinking workshop.

Second, the engagement of engineers and other experts from a local university, the Technological University of the Philippines – Visayas (TUPV) as well as local artists, who not only brought the prototypes to life but also provided mentoring in the maintenance of the waste innovations, has provided Talisay City with a pool of experts who can help them design and deploy more innovations in the future.

And third, there was transparency in the use of the funds with budget details shared to all stakeholders, including the informal waste workers.





One realisation from this experience is that solid waste management is a good entry point for local government units such as Talisay City who are wanting to become more circular. Cities and municipalities have a big role to play not only in reducing downstream waste impacts, but also in investing in upstream waste reduction by looking at the extraction, manufacturing and transportation of natural resources, for example. They also need experience in engaging with other stakeholders/sectors, i.e., the academe (especially state universities with technology/engineering/innovation incubation programs and facilities), civil society, private sector, development partners, etc, as local governments and the waste workers can not transition to a circular economy on their own. The business sector and media is also needed to influence behavior change among consumers and the rest of the value chains that utilize and dispose waste such as plastic.

Scaling and replication will require buy-in from local government and key stakeholders especially with access to enabling technologies or systems, but also further iterations have to focus on potential business models or entrepreneurial elements of these innovations as this too is crucial for adoption by waste workers.



PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through a localized Design Thinking framework developed by PRRCFI, 12 waste workers co-created and implemented 2 innovations to collect and sort waste while also augmenting their livelihoods.

16.13 tonnes

Total waste collected/sorted

1,221.97%

Percent increase of waste collected/sorted

414 households

Households reached through the innovations

224 individuals, 75% women

People directly impacted by project activities

48,743 pax

People reached through social media

17.89%

Average percent increase to waste workers' monthly income

1 SWM GAD Action Plan

Gender-Responsive Knowledge Product

**3 units Customised Kariton,
1 unit Electric Mobile Junkshop**

SWM innovations co-created with waste workers



The Incubation
Network Presents

EQUALITY
in PLASTICS
CIRCULARITY

Women Waste Workers for Wala Usik
Co-Designing a Circular Economy

www.prrcf.org/wow • wow.walausik@danjuganisland.ph • FB/IG: @prrcfi