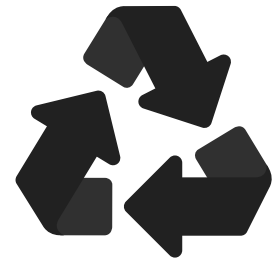


# Designing an Urban Recycling Cooperative



## STUDENT HANDOUT

This exercise is based on an activity developed by my colleague Demet Dinler. With her permission I have adopted her activity, which was based on a series of 6 workshops, to a two-hour workshop for our class.

You will find lots of ideas and practical suggestions for your design activities in the reading for today "Organizing the Unorganized: A Case Study of the KKPKP in Pune."

This resource has been created by Anke Schwittay and can be used and adapted as a creativecommons resource, with acknowledgements.



## **OBJECTIVE OF WORKSHOP**

To design a plan for setting up a recycling cooperative where waste pickers will no longer sell their waste individually to middlemen, but rather will bring, sort and sell it to the cooperative, which will on-sell it directly to wholesale recycling plants and factories reusing materials. This cuts out the middlemen who take a large cut of the sales and allows the cooperative to negotiate for better prices based on higher volume of waste.

The aim of the coop is to provide a local alternative economy initiative to generate more stable and higher sources of income for informal workers and to tackle inequalities in class, gender and ethnicity.

## **SETTING**

An informal neighbourhood in a country of the GS where people from different ethnic backgrounds live together. Most people engage in informal, low-paid and unstable work, mainly waste picking.



## CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

- The cooperative will be a direct challenge to the vested interests of the middlemen who have traditionally bought the waste from individual collectors, and also to large wholesalers who work with recycling plants. Especially the middlemen, most of whom also live in the neighbourhood, want to stop the establishment of the cooperative. How will you overcome their resistance? In addition, there have been rumors that the municipal government is planning to outsource to garbage collection to a private company, which would displace waste pickers all together. How will you prevent that?
- The urban spaces (homes, dump sites, streets, public garbage bins) from which individual waste pickers get their waste are divided along ethnic line, with some groups having access to lower-quality and less amount of waste and therefore getting paid less. Because one of the founding values of the cooperative is economic equalities among all members, you will need to change that. How will you overcome resistance from ethnic groups who are used to getting higher-quality waste and get them to buy into the egalitarian vision of the cooperative? How will you ensure that equality within the cooperative's design (legal, logistic, economic)?
- Most women in the neighbourhood are responsible for domestic work and are not allowed to get paid work, following deeply entrenched patriarchal rules, although many women would like to earn money. As one of the objectives of the cooperative is to work for gender equality, this situation needs to be addressed. How will you do that and get the women involved in the cooperative? On the other hand, in many families children are also picking waste to supplement family income. How will you address that?
- You do not have the resources to start the cooperative and will need to identify and approach local leaders, municipal and other public authorities, NGOs and donors, local banks or other places for support. How will you do that?



Your first group task is to decide **whether you want to locate your cooperative in a specific city/country** or not, and if so, where. You also need to decide on a **name for your coop**  
(15 minutes)

## SMALL GROUP WORK

Then you will work in smaller groups on a series of sub-tasks to design answers to the questions above. Here are the four different sub-groups, join the one you are most interested in (you might want to divide up the tasks within your sub-group as appropriate).

Document your work as it develops using the materials provided (60 minutes, you can take a short break during this time as your group sees fit):





## 1 GOVERNANCE

Write a list of general principles and rules to govern the cooperative. Make sure you clearly articulate its core values and explain how they will inform the day-to-day operations of the cooperative as well as its more general functioning.

- How will you ensure a truly cooperative and equitable work environment, eg charter of behaviour, sanctions, training, ways to deal with divisive gossip, conflict resolution mechanisms etc?
- How will you ensure that the coop is representative of all members? By whom will it actually be run? Do you have paid staff, volunteers, elected representatives? How would you convert freeloaders (waste pickers who are not members but are claiming the benefits of the coop) into new members?
- How will you work to create an identity among your members, as workers who make an important contribution to the city's economy, cleanliness, environment and public health? Design an ID card showing the coop's logo as part of this process.
- How will you educate coop members about the significance of their work?
- What are your main ways of communicating with members?
- Will you charge a membership fee and if yes, how much will it be?



## 2 EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Develop a plan for which potential supporters you could approach and write your pitch/presentation to them (point 4 above).

- This pitch will need to be tailored to the different kinds of organization you are asking for support, eg
  - an NGO interested in issues of justice
  - a bank you might ask for a low-interest loan
  - a local politician who might be interested in votes
  - a local business wanting to show that it is socially responsible and engaged in the community
  - an environmental charity interested in issues of sustainability
- Part of your strategy is to get the municipal government to provide a piece of land or a property for the cooperative's use. Similarly, your members need to be able to do an initial sorting of the scrap where they pick it up and want to be able to use dedicated spaces by the side of roads for that (one option would be to re-designate a small number of existing car parking spaces). The municipality initially refuses both points. What organizing tactics will you use to get councillors to change their minds?
- The residents of the middle and upper-class neighborhoods where coop members pick waste regard them as a public nuisance and harass or otherwise discriminate against them. How will you change their opinion of and attitude towards waste pickers?
- How will you ensure that your external supporters will not impose their own vision of how things should be on the coop?



### 3 ECONOMIC

Work out the economic principles of the cooperatives:

- How will members get paid?
- How will you set the prices for different types of recyclables? How will you ensure that all members get equal access to the same opportunities in terms of quality and quantity of waste (point 2 above)?
- How will you ensure that individual members will not sell their recyclables directly to the plant or go back to middlemen when they have immediate cash needs?
- How will you negotiate with the wholesaler for better prices for the coop's recyclables? How will you plan for fluctuations in the price of recyclables which are dependent on macro-economic factors and sometimes can dip severely at short notice?
- Then develop a strategy for how to deal with the expected resistance from established middlemen and the plans of the municipality to privatize garbage collection (we assume that the rumors in point 1 above are true)?



#### **4 SOCIAL (GENDER AND CHILDREN)**

1. Develop a plan for talking to families about women's involvement in the cooperative and the issue of child labor (point 3 above).

- What is the best format for these talks, eg house to house visits, community meeting, focus group, women only, couples, street theatre, social media?
- What is your message around why women should become involved? How will you address patriarchal power and arguments?
- In what concrete ways should women get involved?
- How would you address their childcare needs for younger children?
- How would you address the involvement of older children in waste picking?





## **COLLECTIVE MASTERPLAN**

Towards the end of the activity you will come together as a large group again and combine all your findings into a master plan that should address the most important issues. Your final group creation should be a poster visually representing your plan (30 minutes).

We will have a debrief drawing out the learnings from the activity and connecting it the larger themes of the module at the beginning of next class.