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Local state practices of informal waste picker integration: the case of the Metsimaholo Local Municipality, Sasolburg

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Abstract:

Informal waste picker integration into formal waste management systems in South Africa is supported by the recognition of waste pickers as an important part of recycling in the National Waste Management Strategy (DEA, 2011a). Although informal waste pickers have gained government recognition, little research has focused on the challenges that municipalities and municipal officials face regarding their integration. While the responsibility for waste management is vested in local municipalities through the South African Constitution, policy instruments and tools that guide municipal practices are limited. This affects the practices of municipal officials in relation to the informal sector and the approaches taken to recognise the informal sector. The Metsimaholo Local Municipality which includes Sasolburg, an industrial town, presents a good case for the study of challenges faced by local municipalities.

The case of Sasolburg is unique, in comparison to other South African municipalities, because the local municipality was not the key driver of integration. Integration was initiated by informal waste pickers seeking municipal recognition for their role in waste reclaiming (Samson, 2009).

The literature threads I focus on include waste recycling systems in the global South and practices of local state officials. The aim of the research report was to understand the challenges that municipal officials face regarding the integration of informal waste pickers into the formal waste management system. The objective of the research was to understand the practices of state officials in the municipality. A key finding that emerged was that waste picker integration has been a challenge for officials because waste management in the MLM prioritises waste collection and disposal services with little guidance for the diversification of solid waste management to include waste pickers. In this context waste management officials' practice is guided by an understanding of waste picker integration as the contracting of waste picker cooperatives, which results in an absence of initiatives to integrate the majority of waste pickers who work independently on the streets and in the landfills.

Key Terms: Integration, Practical norms, Official norms, Solid waste management, Waste pickers.