



**CWG**

## Collaborative Working Group on Solid Waste Management in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

### Knowledge sharing, capacity building and policy advocacy for solid waste management that benefits the urban poor

#### FACT BOX

Established	1995
Goal	To achieve fundamental improvements in the approach to urban solid waste management in low- and middle-income countries, through knowledge sharing, capacity building and policy advocacy
Partners	There is no formal membership. More than 200 institutions and individuals participate in CWG's activities, to varying degrees. Core Group (2004) members are from GTZ, WASTE (NL), Skat, ERM (UK).
Budget and Donors	There is no standing budget. Workshops and publications have been funded with contributions collected for the specific purpose from different sources. Among the major contributors have been SDC, the World Bank, GTZ, DGIS, DANIDA and SIDA.
Tools for Knowledge Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ International workshops on top priority thematic issues, held every 2 years</li> <li>■ Reports of these workshops, including collections of case studies</li> <li>■ The CWG website</li> <li>■ Publications with a practical emphasis (manuals, guidance packs) published by CWG members following needs addressed and jointly defined at and in between workshops</li> <li>■ Informal co-ordination between members, especially of the Core Group.</li> </ul>
Countries	Worldwide. Present Core Group members are all from Western Europe. To date, the strongest participation from developing countries has been from Asia and English-speaking Africa.

CWG core group members from:



Other members and contributors, institutional and individual, from:



... and

approx. 200 more – the CWG is an informal network.



Recycling of municipal waste provides income for thousands. Household segregation could make this work more hygienic.

## The CWG in a Nutshell

The CWG is an informal association of donors, international organisations, NGOs, municipal personnel, experts from NGOs and others with a particular interest in solid waste management in developing countries. The mission of the CWG is to achieve

fundamental improvements in the approach to urban solid waste management in low- and middle-income countries, through knowledge sharing, capacity building and policy advocacy.

### Key events in the development of the network

1995	<b>Ittigen</b> , Switzerland: the CWG is formed to follow up on the results of an international workshop on solid waste management initiated by SDC in cooperation with the World Bank and the Urban Management Programme
1996	<b>Washington</b> workshop on public-private partnerships <b>Cairo</b> workshop on the involvement of micro- and small enterprises
1998	<b>Belo Horizonte</b> workshop on upgrading options for waste disposal
2000	<b>Manila</b> workshop on planning for sustainable and integrated solid waste management
2003	<b>Dar es Salaam</b> workshop on solid waste collection that benefits the urban poor
2004	The CWG launches a joint working plan and establishes a minimum structure (Core Group and small Secretariat) to coordinate activities and the development of the network.

## Origins and development of the CWG

### 1995: Ittigen

At the origin of the initiative that later came to be known as the CWG is the wish of SDC and UMP (UNCHS/Habitat, World Bank, UNDP and several ESAs) to convene ESAs to formulate a collaborative support strategy for municipal solid waste management (MSWM). In 1995 a workshop is organized in Ittigen (Switzerland) with 20 participants representing 10 organizations (ESAs, research centers and consultants). They exchange views, develop a conceptual framework for MSWM, and set up a coordinated medium-term action plan.

### 1996: Washington – Cairo

The initiative calls itself the “UMP/SDC Collaborative Programme on MSW in Low-income Countries” and organizes two international workshops to advance two of the key issues identified in Ittigen: promotion of public/private partnerships (Washington, 35 participants) and the involvement of micro and small enterprises (Cairo, 60 participants).

Participants now include representatives from the public and private sectors, ESAs, professional bodies and research institutions, from all continents. While funding of the Programme’s activities: workshops, case

study research and tools development, remains in the hands of the initiators (SDC and World Bank / UMP), ownership and active involvement for the agenda gradually shifts to a broader range of actors.

### 1997 - 2003: Belo Horizonte - Manila - Dar es Salaam

An increasing number of institutions and individuals, up to more than 200 by 2002, get involved in filling the knowledge gaps identified in the 1995 Ittigen Conceptual Framework. Although no formal membership is defined, participants consider themselves as “members” of the group which by the year 2000 adopts its present name “Collaborative Working Group on Solid Waste Management in Low- and Middle-income Countries” and the acronym “CWG”.

CWG workshops are held in 1998, 2000 and 2003, funded by a diverse array of ESAs. The thematic focus is on the following priority issues: upgrading options for waste disposal (Belo Horizonte, 60 participants), planning for sustainable and integrated SWM (solid waste management) (Manila, 75 participants) and solid waste collection that benefits the urban poor (Dar es Salaam, 90 participants).

More than 20 key knowledge products (manuals, guidance packs, software, decision-maker's guides) are produced by CWG members, either as single institutional contributions or as joint efforts of several members within the framework. A group of approximately ten institutions and individuals, constituting the "core group", takes the lead of the initiative. Preparation of CWG workshops and joint development of knowledge tools / publications are instances of intensive participation, exchange and cooperation between members.

### 2004: A new structure and program

At the 2003 workshop, a strategy for the future of the CWG is discussed and agreed. Members see the CWG as the main lobby platform or voice of the SWM sector in developing countries and defines a 5- to 10-year agenda. No formal membership policy is adopted, but a small secretariat is established at Skat to coordinate the planned advocacy, networking, regional capacity building and knowledge product development activities.

## Vision, objectives and some guiding principles

### Vision of the CWG

The CWG aims to achieve fundamental improvements in the approach to solid waste management in low- and middle-income countries, focusing in particular in improved livelihoods and living conditions for the urban poor.

### Specific Objectives of the CWG

The CWG seeks

- to raise the profile of SWM with decision-makers at city, national and international levels.
- to serve as a centre of expertise and knowledge on integrated and sustainable SWM in low- and middle-income countries
- to build regional capacity for improved and sustainable SWM
- to develop and disseminate new knowledge products on SWM

### Some guiding principles

#### Concept of "solid waste management"

The CWG sees solid waste management not primarily from a technical standpoint, but acknowledges that social, financial, administrative and political aspects are often more important than technical factors. The

CWG promotes integrated and sustainable solid waste management (generally abbreviated to ISWM), an approach to waste management stretching beyond the usual technical, financial and equipment-oriented approach, and taking into account local socio-cultural, environmental, institutional, financial/economic, policy and political aspects.

#### Concept of "collaborative working group / network"

The CWG operates as a network organisation and as a centre of expertise, to integrate, in a flexible way, various organisations and practitioners in the North and the South that together possess a wealth of knowledge, thus making their knowledge available to a wider audience. It also provides a mechanism for donors to co-ordinate their interventions in this area, and to link them into the wider international agendas.

#### Importance of SWM in the international development agenda

The CWG wants to demonstrate the linkages of improved SWM to poverty reduction, sustainable urban development, improved public health, improved urban governance, sustainable consumption and production, combating climate change and protecting biodiversity, and seeks working linkages with other fora to ensure that SWM is integrated into those wider agendas.

## How the CWG is organized

### The CWG: a network, a working group, a community of practice

Due to the CWG's hitherto informal nature, no organizational chart could reflect the actual dynamics between the CWG members or actors. The CWG can be described from different perspectives. It is at the same time

an **informal knowledge network**, in which members participate voluntarily and with full autonomy,

a **working group**, in which partners work together on concrete projects such as workshops and the development of tools and other publications,

and a **community of practice**: "a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about

a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis”<sup>1</sup>.

**CWG membership: a large thematic group**

As a network, the CWG relies strongly on the interest and motivation of its partners and as a result, there is no formal membership. Its long-term partnerships are based on common interest and mutual trust. The scope of membership includes bilateral and multilateral ESAs, non-governmental organisations, local authorities, training centres, universities, representatives of the private sector (SWM industry, consulting firms) and individual SWM practitioners.

**Structural functions within the CWG**

Up to 2003, the CWG has been guided by a group of interested professionals who acted together as an informal steering group – each individual participating by electronic mail from his or her own organisation or institution.

Only a very limited range of organisational work and other activities could be undertaken since funding was earmarked for either a workshop or a publication. In the most recent CWG workshop in Dar es Salaam (2003), the network members decided that the CWG should seek to establish itself on a continuous basis. For that purpose, an executive team, a secretariat and

a programme review committee have been formed, and they started to operate in 2004:

- The executive team or core group manages day-to-day operations. In this initial stage the team consists of: David Wilson (ERM /Imperial College, UK), Manfred Scheu (GTZ, Germany), Juerg Christen (Skat, Switzerland), and Arnold van de Klundert (WASTE, NL).
- A lean, co-ordinating secretariat (at Skat) facilitates networking, keeps track of all CWG activities, steers programme development and manages the exchange and dissemination of information. It also acts as the legal basis or seat and as contact point for donors. It sets up and maintains the CWG web-site, publishes a regular CWG newsletter and coordinates the organization of workshops and the development and dissemination of knowledge products.
- A formal programme review committee for governance matters is composed of two ESA representatives, two members from the thematic group (from the South), and two members from the executive team.

**Legal status**

Up to now, the CWG has been an entirely informal network with no legal status. While members are determined to maintain that informality and their own independence, which have been key factors in the

**Infobox: Operational plan / Agenda of the CWG for 2004 – 2007 (an overview)**

Specific CWG objective	Envisaged outputs (a selection)
1 Raise the profile of SWM among decision-makers at city, national and international levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Link SWM improvements to Millennium Development Goals, integrate in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF)</li> <li>■ Involve CWG in cross-cutting programmes</li> <li>■ Decision-maker’s guides for pro-poor SWM</li> <li>■ Reach municipal decision-makers</li> </ul>
2 Enhance networking and knowledge sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Regional networks and forums</li> <li>■ Web- and e-mail-based global knowledge sharing network</li> <li>■ Link to international and regional professional associations (ISWA etc.)</li> </ul>
3 Build regional capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Regional capacity building programmes at political, administrative and technical levels.</li> <li>■ Regional train-the-trainer workshops.</li> <li>■ Regional versions of key CWG publications</li> <li>■ Regional and international CWG workshops</li> </ul>
4 Develop and disseminate new knowledge products	<p>Catalyze research and knowledge development on the top priority “burning” issues, such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ SWM and poverty reduction</li> <li>■ SWM and urban governance</li> <li>■ Pro-poor public-private partnerships</li> <li>■ Cost recovery in SWM</li> <li>■ Sustainable production and consumption, appropriate waste minimisation, sustainable recycling</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002): Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge.



Community members should be involved in decision making

network's success, it will be necessary in 2004 to obtain a legal registration (as a non-profit association in Switzerland), in order to be able to receive and account for donor funding for the CWG's comprehensive long-term programme.

### Operational plan

To face the challenges ahead, the CWG has set up a long-term multi-donor programme, with a 5 to 10 year planning horizon. The programme is modular in nature, so that it is easy for individual donors to fund particular modules, alone or together with others.

### Funding

In the past, CWG members, in a "collaborative effort", have succeeded in raising reasonable amounts of funding from a variety of sources every 1½ to 2 years for the organisation of international workshops and publications. As part of its new organization, the CWG seeks to raise funding for its long-term, multi-donor programme and for its own 'core' functions, which bind the programme together into a coherent whole and provide continuity. For 2004, the CWG secretariat is supported by GTZ and the Skat Foundation, while other donors are being approached.

## How knowledge is shared through the CWG

### International workshops on top priority thematic issues

Up to now the six international workshops organized by the CWG have been the highlights and milestones of the network's knowledge sharing. They were - and will continue to be the focal point of the network for many reasons, because they

- bring together stakeholders from a broad variety of institutional and regional settings, whose interaction

during the workshop often leads to further collaboration projects

- bring together a wide range of experiences from all continents, through case studies and the presence of the participants themselves
- constitute a joint funding effort of the CWG partners
- make a local impact at the different venues (chosen to cover a different region on each event), raising local and regional awareness about SWM and the CWG

### Infobox: Tools developed within the framework of the CWG (a selection)

Year	Title	Authors	Published, edited, funded by
1996	<b>Conceptual framework</b> for municipal solid waste management in low-income countries	Schubeler, Christen, Wehrle	UMP, SDC, Skat
1998	Solid waste Management: <b>Directory</b> of English-language publications and organizations	Coad	SDC, Skat
1998	Municipal solid waste management: <b>Involving micro- and small enterprises</b> - Guidelines for municipal managers	Haan, Coad, Lardinois	SDC, WASTE, GTZ, Skat
1999	<b>Solid waste landfills</b> in middle- and lower-income countries: A technical guide to planning, design and operation	Rushbrook, Pugh	World Bank
1999	Safe management of <b>wastes from health-care activities</b>	Prüss, Giroult, Rushbrook	WHO
2000	<b>Private sector participation</b> in municipal solid waste management: Guidance Pack (5 Volumes)	Cointreau, Gopalan, Coad	Skat
2000	COSEPRE - <b>Costs of Urban Solid Waste Services</b> : Version 1.0 for WINDOWS 98 (Software, Technical Guide and User's Manual)		World Bank, CEPIS/PAHO
2000	<b>Strategic planning guide</b> for municipal solid waste management. (CD-ROM)	Wilson	World Bank, SDC, DFID
2000	A toolkit for <b>social assessment and public participation</b> in municipal solid waste management	Bernstein	World Bank



SWM provides a source of income for many - but not always safe and decent jobs

- target the burning, priority issues of SWM in a comprehensive way
- provide a platform for launching and discussing new knowledge products
- act as a forum for setting and updating the agenda, defining needs and preparing new knowledge products

### Reports of these workshops

The six CWG workshop reports include the presentations, discussions and outcomes of the workshops, and a collection of case study material related to the workshop's topic. Produced and distributed in printed and electronic form (internet and CD-ROM), the reports are widely used and referred to, providing evidence that the workshops benefit an audience far greater than the restricted number of workshop participants.

### Publications

More than 20 evidence-based publications with a distinctly practical emphasis (manuals, guidance packs, decision-maker's guides, software) have been produced by CWG members, following needs addressed and jointly defined at and between workshops. The high standard and practical use of these tools are widely appreciated by policy makers, municipal practitioners, NGOs, training organisations and universities. Further

development of these and of new tools is being planned and coordinated between CWG members, as well as efforts to enhance their dissemination, which will include translations and adaptations to meet specific regional needs.

### CWG website

CWG documents, address lists and other network resources were made available from 1999 to 2003 on a first CWG website hosted by CWG member MELISSA in South Africa. A new interactive webpage is being developed in 2004 by the CWG secretariat.

### Direct linkages and communication between members

The CWG has expanded as a worldwide thematic network over the last 8 years. By means of the workshops and the publications, uncountable opportunities for inter-personal and inter-institutional exchange, collaboration and coordination have been created and exploited. This function - as a "matchmaking platform" - has greatly helped members to become more efficient and effective in their work of promoting more sustainable SWM in developing countries. The CWG approach to sharing and learning is that of a community of practice: informal, interest- and need-driven, open-ended and flexible.

## Some lessons learnt

### Networks work!

As far as the aspect of knowledge sharing is concerned, the 8-year experience of the CWG fully confirms the basic assumption behind any network, which is that by sharing their knowledge and resources, the members can achieve much more than just the sum of their own individual efforts. Many synergies can be developed, duplication of efforts avoided, knowledge gaps filled, and time and money resources saved to the benefit of the member's work.

### Flexibility as basis for continuity

The CWG evolved through quite different phases, from its inception as an initiative for ESA coordination, then to a common effort with an increasingly broader base of more diverse members, to today's informal network with a minimum structure. While the main actors and driving forces changed over the lifetime of the CWG, the common thematic interest in achieving substantial improvements in SWM in the developing world has

consistently been strong enough to motivate members again and again to maintain the network alive and push its agenda forward.

### A network's structural weakness can be a strength

It may come as a surprise to learn that most members value the high degree of informality of the network - at the same time a result of and the reason for the lack continuous funding - as one of the major factors of its success. It must be said, though, that the CWG would probably have ceased to exist without a critical minimum core of committed members who, funded by their organizations, again and again found ways to aggregate their energies to push forward plans for workshops, publications and networking.

### A good network is driven by real demand

The CWG is a good example of how, in a vital network, ownership can shift between member groups over the



Composting of organic waste

time. As more stakeholders are included, their degree of commitment defines the direction the network takes. In this way, the CWG went through various phases. Started eight years ago as an ESA initiative, it can be anticipated today that the “drivers” of the network will, in the years to come, be located more and more in the “low- and middle-income countries”.

### **The strongest moments in a network are when joint actions are undertaken**

There is no doubt that knowledge exchange and the generation of new ideas were most intensive where members engaged in practical, concrete projects, such as the organization of the international workshops or the creation of new knowledge tools.

### **Personal relationships are essential**

The CWG has organized a series of international workshops for which the preparation, participation and follow-up have been of a very high degree of quality. While the value of these workshops can be questioned because of the high costs involved – in spite of efforts to cut out the frills and economise wherever possible, it is evident that the opportunities for direct interpersonal linkages they provided constitute the “crystallization points” of the whole network activity. Every single initiative, every single deliverable of the CWG can be tracked back to one of the workshops. It is difficult to imagine that a similar sense of joint enterprise, consistent over the time, could have been created without these instances of personal interaction.

## **Outlook: some challenges ahead**

### **Overcoming cultural, language and financial barriers**

One of the CWG’s key factors of success has been that it always could rely on the high (personal) motivation, initiative and dedication of its members, particularly of those who formed the “core group”. The main promoters of the network were, however, mostly those whose personal and professional position provided for the necessary time or financial resources, and most of these are still based in Western Europe and North America. In order to achieve the envisaged “fundamental improvements in SWM”, network activity and ownership will have to shift more and more towards the South, and the necessary resources directed accordingly.

It will be of particular importance to overcome the present limitation of CWG’s work to the English language. Publications will have to be translated and adapted to at least French and Spanish.<sup>1</sup>

### **Institutional ownership of the solid waste management sector**

Another challenge which faces the solid waste management sector as a whole is that, in many countries, SWM is a local issue with no clear responsibility or representative at national level. As a result it is more difficult to tap into a national network of SWM experts. Outside capital cities, SWM specialists are often at a relatively low level and without convenient

access to the Internet or other types of network. As a result it is more difficult to disseminate information and develop effective two-way networking. This lack of central institutional ownership may also impact on donor support.

### **Developing grass-roots networking mechanisms**

Most of the CWG “partners” in the South have been linked to NGOs and capital cities. There is a need to find effective ways of strengthening and extending links with municipal / local government SWM specialists. To effectively participate in a knowledge network like the CWG, many of them are limited by language barriers, severe financial constraints (making it difficult for them to buy books, take out subscriptions and travel to meetings), and little access to the internet. Possible means of reaching out to these people include lightweight, low-cost publications and national focal points who can correspond and translate relevant information, and also feed back to workshops and the Secretariat information about the needs and interests in the provincial cities.

### **Membership policy**

Whether membership of the CWG is to remain completely open and informal or whether other, more exclusive modalities of commitment should be sought, is a topic of ongoing discussion within the CWG. The probable development is towards a combined approach: on one side, extension to a much broader

<sup>1</sup> The CWG booklet “Solid waste collection that benefits the urban poor – suggested guidelines for municipal authorities” is already being translated to Arabic and Swahili, responding to local demand in Egypt and Tanzania.



Mountain of uncollected waste: SWM as indicator of good local governance

number and range (geographical and institutional) of members with a low entry barrier (e.g. electronic registration for mailing list and discussion forums). On the other side, the commitment of financial resources for the modules of the CWG joint working programme will require more formal arrangements for those members who participate directly in their implementation.

### **Community of practice or structured working group, or both?**

In this connection, perhaps the biggest challenge for the CWG will be to maintain the balance between the

informality, openness and flexibility that characterize a vital community of practice (free flow of knowledge), and the more organized, structured, action-oriented approach (managed programme consortium type) that is presently being developed by the core group and secretariat. The CWG will best “achieve fundamental improvements in the approach to solid waste management in low-and middle-income countries” if it succeeds in combining both energies: the energy of a learning community that shares freely and the energy of a task group committed to attaining tangible results.

#### **List of abbreviations**

CWG	Collaborative Working Group on Solid Waste Management in Low- and Middle- income Countries
ESAs	External support agencies
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SWM	Solid Waste Management
ISWM	Integrated SWM
MSWM	Municipal SWM
UMP	Urban Management Programme

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