



CASE STUDY — Metro Manila, Philippines; Semarang, Indonesia

Women in Waste’s Economic Empowerment Activity: Empowering Women to Reduce Ocean Plastics

Case in Brief

Women have vital roles in the waste value chain—from informal waste collectors, street sweepers, local junkshop¹ managers, to community recycling leaders and policy makers—with great potential to increase the amount of plastic waste collected and recycled and to help reduce the amount of plastic reaching the ocean. However, due to gendered structural barriers women usually lack opportunities and resources to realize their full potential in the waste sector and commonly face gender discrimination and even violence.

USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean—the Agency’s global flagship program under the [Save our Seas Initiative](#)—centers gender equality in its approach to addressing ocean plastic pollution. Its Women in Waste’s Economic Empowerment (WWEE) activity empowers women to meaningfully participate in the waste sector and receive recognition by local government authorities and their communities for the services they provide. **WWEE offers innovative business, personal, and women’s empowerment training combined with a business incubator program that offers mentorship and funding opportunities to help women turn their waste and recycling business ideas into startups or expand their existing enterprises.**



At a Glance

Globally, it is estimated that **over half of all recycled plastic is collected by informal waste collectors**,² many of whom are women.

Women own about one (1) of every three (3) junkshops in the Philippines—with the **minimum startup capital at \$2,000**.³

¹ The term “junkshop” is used in the Philippines to describe a small-scale business that sells previously used materials to larger aggregators and recyclers. In Indonesia they are referred to as scrap dealers.
² University of Leeds, “Tracking the Flow of Plastic Pollution,” <https://spotlight.leeds.ac.uk/plastic-pollution/index.html>.
³ Clean Cities, Blue Ocean, “Gender Equality And Women’s Economic Empowerment,” December, 2021, <https://urban-links.org/resource/clean-cities-blue-ocean-gender-equality-womens-economic-empowerment-fact-sheet/>.

Background

In low- to middle-income countries across the world, women play key roles in local solid waste management systems. **As cities struggle to manage their waste collection, informal waste collectors, many of whom are women, are critical to providing municipal collection services that keep communities and the environment free of plastic waste.** Over half of the plastics sent to recycling centers—and therefore diverted from entering the ocean—are collected by informal waste collectors.⁴ Women also work in or own small recycling centers, “junkshops”, and upcycling enterprises—where discarded items are transformed into new products.

Despite these crucial contributions to the solid waste management value chain, women’s work is often unrecognized and under-resourced.

Women face gendered structural barriers that limit their earnings and impede upward mobility opportunities, preventing their full economic participation in the value chain. They often have limited access to credit, professional training, market information, healthcare benefits, personal protective equipment, and time due to childcare and household responsibilities. As a result, women in countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia often work in the informal sector as waste pickers, where they receive lower wages than men and possess few legal, health, and safety protections. A heightened risk of gender-based violence (GBV) further minimizes their effective participation in the sector.

For Riza Santoyo, WWEE’s first-funded entrepreneur, the activity helped her establish a door-to-door waste collection business. With access to new skills and equipment, Riza has doubled her income to over \$120 per month and increased her family’s savings to more than \$200, while working fewer hours than before. The activity also helped to build her confidence and change her outlook toward her profession.

“With this door-to-door collection business, I won’t need to spend hours on the streets collecting waste. I will have more time for my children.”

– Riza

WWEE’s First Funded Entrepreneur



Riza Santoyo collecting recyclables in Quezon City, Metro Manila.
Photo: Giulia Sorial/USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean

⁴ University of Leeds, “Tracking the Flow of Plastic Pollution,” <https://spotlight.leeds.ac.uk/plastic-pollution/index.html>.

Our Approach

Clean Cities, Blue Ocean's WWEE activity aligns with [USAID's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy](#) in its approach to advancing gender equality and economic security through the creation of green jobs in the waste sector. The activity is piloting a model that empowers women through tailored leadership, gender equality, solid waste management, health and safety, and business skills training so that they can develop the confidence and skills to develop formal relationships with local governments, and establish or expand their waste-related businesses.



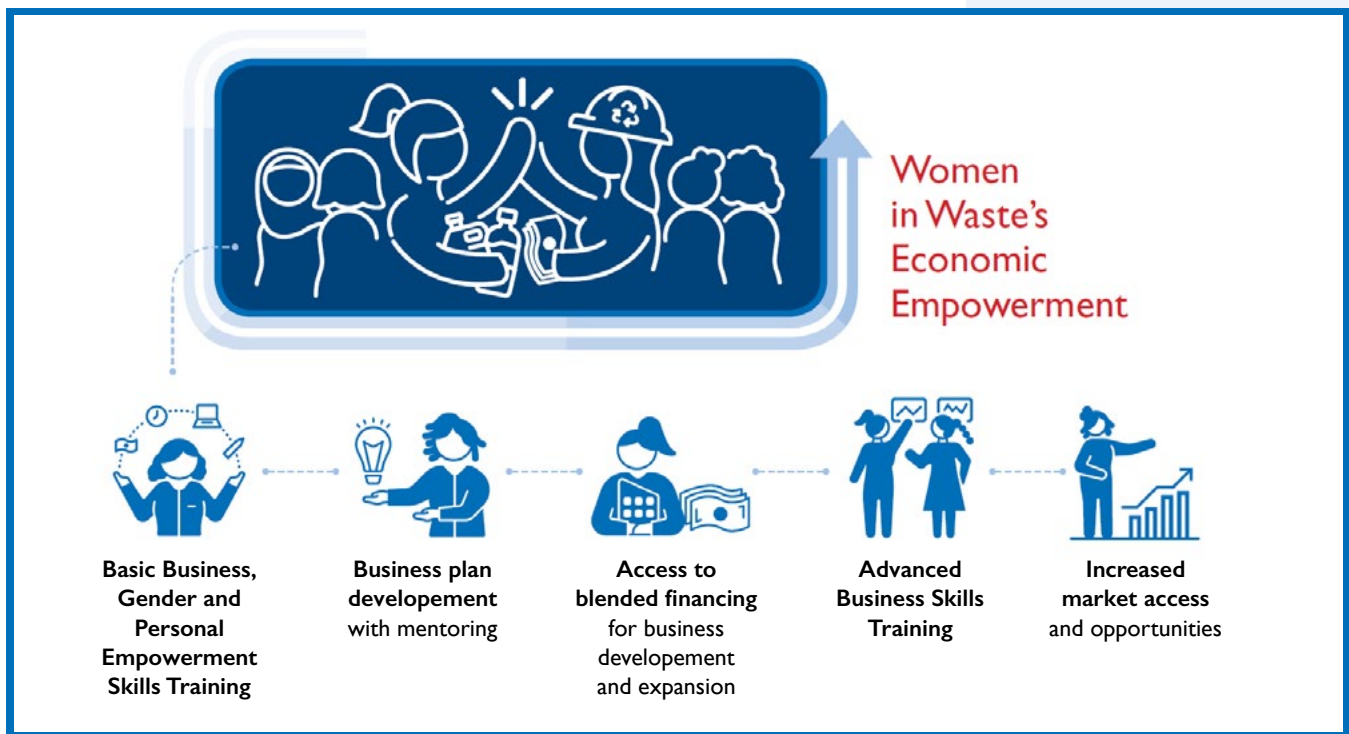
The first Basic Business and Empowerment Skills Training cohort in the Philippines under the WWEE activity.
Photo: Joel Delos Santos/Ecowaste Coalition

If cities are to increase waste recovery, segregation, and recycling rates in a gender equal way, they must prioritize the integration of women into organized solid waste management systems. The WWEE activity, piloted in Metro Manila, Philippines, and Semarang, Indonesia, offers a new approach to advancing gender equality and creating green jobs in the waste sector, with the potential of being replicated and scaled for greater impact across the globe.

Whole-person Approach

WWEE employs an approach that addresses the gender-related constraints and key issues facing many women in the waste sector, such as gender-based violence, the inability to access funding and larger markets, among other challenges. The WWEE approach goes beyond just aiming to increase women's living wages—it takes a "whole-person" approach, enabling women waste collectors' access to business knowledge and valuable life skills that they wouldn't otherwise receive. **The program combines a unique set of training, mentorship, and funding—a joint business and empowerment model—that provides women the skills and resources for advancement to make meaningful and lasting change in their business, personal, and family lives.**

WWEE's first-of-its-kind, five-step reinforcing approach empowers women as leaders in local emerging circular economies in the Philippines and Indonesia.



Five steps of WWEE

1 Access Basic Business and Empowerment Skills Training or “BBEST” –

Participants join a six-day foundational training that includes basic business development skills, addresses personal and sectoral gender issues, occupational health and safety, and includes personal empowerment and entrepreneurship training

2 Engage in Business Plan Development with Mentoring –

BEST graduates elect to receive coaching sessions to prepare and pitch a business plan to potential investors

3 Access to Blended Financing for Business Development and Expansion –

BBEST graduates pitch their business ideas to a panel of public and private sector investors, with successful pitches receiving blended financing

4 Participate in Advanced Business Skills Training –

Funded recipients receive advanced business skills training to increase the performance and sustainability of their businesses

5 Increase Market Access and Opportunities –

WWEE promotes public-private partnerships that can formalize WWEE businesses through municipal contracts, raise the professional profile of solid waste and recycling providers, and eliminate legal barriers that hamper the development and success of women in the sector



Mentors assisting trainees at the first Basic Business and Empowerment Skills Training in the Philippines.
Photo: Joel Delos Santos/Ecowaste Coalition

Partnership Model

WWEE's approach fosters cross-sector partnerships for greater impact and sustainability and to ensure women's role in the waste sector is rooted within a supportive enabling environment.

WWEE's Key Partners

Local and Non-governmental Organizations – Local non-governmental organizations, EcoWaste Coalition and the Associated Resources for Management and Development (ARMDEV) in the Philippines and Yayasan Kesejahteraan Keluarga Soegijapranata Semarang and PT Siap Akselerasi Berkarya in Indonesia, have received USAID funding to develop and deliver WWEE's basic and advanced training components and recruit, support, mentor, and monitor the success of its participants.

Training Partners – The Johns Hopkins University's Self-Empowerment and Equity for Change (SEE Change) Initiative works with USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean and its grantees to incorporate its Empowered Entrepreneur training into WWEE's curriculum, train trainers, provide ongoing coaching support, and track resulting changes in women's agency and confidence.

National Training and Education Agencies – National training and education agencies such as the Philippines' Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) are in the process of accrediting WWEE's BBEST curriculum to institutionalize the curriculum.

Local Governments – Local governments in Metro Manila, Philippines, and Semarang, Indonesia help to institutionalize change and provide in-kind donations of training space, funding, and access to complementary local government programs to selected women, where possible.

Private Sector Partners – Coca-Cola Foundation (global and Philippines) mobilizes funding that expands informal waste businesses, strengthens women entrepreneurs' management skills, and catalyzes their participation in a circular economy. For example, the Coca-Cola Foundation provides funding support to WWEE's mentorship and blended finance components through a grant to the World Wildlife Fund for Nature-Philippines; and sits on USAID's Clean Cities, Blue Ocean's panel to evaluate and fund participants' business pitches.

Government – Funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation supports a portion of WWEE's grant to local organization, ARMDEV.

Local Industry Partners – Other actors in the local waste value chain support WWEE, such as Linis Ganda, the Philippines' largest network of junkshops that has helped to recruit participants and serves as a resource for graduates. In Indonesia, BBEST participants have been connected with another USAID's Clean Cities, Blue Ocean grantee and provider of high-quality, fully certified recycled plastic, Prevented Ocean Plastic Indonesia (POPI), to build participants' business capacity, networks, and market opportunities.



“Before, we operated a makeshift waste bank and only sold our materials to collectors because we didn't have any connections or relationships. After participating in BBEST, I had the opportunity to meet other established waste banks and build close relationships with them. As a result, I was able to enter our waste bank into the Semarang City Waste Bank Association,⁵ which has provided us with updated information and support from the government.”

– **Wakiatin**
BBEST Graduate and
Waste Bank Manager
Semarang, Indonesia

ABOVE
Wakiatin attending the BBEST
Training in Semarang, Indonesia.

Photo: Giulia Sorial/USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean

⁵ In Indonesia, waste banks provide community members a location to deposit their recyclable waste, where people get to “bank” the value of the waste they deliver.

Impact

USAID's WWEE activity has enabled women to succeed and increase their livelihoods in the waste sector, while also building their agency and confidence in their personal lives.

Through WWEE's five-step training, mentorship, and funding model, the activity is enabling women in the Philippines and Indonesia to transform their waste business ideas into start-ups, expanded enterprises, or franchised operations, and to be part of a supportive network with access to larger markets and public sector contracts. This reinforcing approach has proven successful for multiple reasons, including its partnerships with private sector, local government, and other local actors that have created a supportive and sustainable enabling environment for businesses—and their owners—to thrive.

- **Delivering Business and Empowerment Training to Over 700 Women** – The BBEST training, which by August 2023 had reached more than 700 women in Indonesia and the Philippines, has received overwhelming praise from participants. For the BBEST graduates that proceeded to the mentoring stage, the training curriculum was foundational for their future success in developing and pitching their business plans. Monitoring data found that women learned different skills depending on their personal context, country, and cohort, but reported improved interpersonal relationships, psychological strategies, and business and budgeting skills.
- **Serving as an Incubator to Advance Women-owned Enterprises** – A total of 32 microenterprises have been awarded funding for 45 women to establish or expand their operations. USAID, through the WWEE activity, has leveraged over \$250,000 in private investment to fund selected WWEE graduates' businesses. In addition to creating green jobs as women expand and staff their businesses, new recovery and recycling businesses are expanding waste services to parts of cities that formal waste collection services are not able to reach—and where open waste dumping causes a serious threat to the environment and human health.
- **Increasing Women's Work/Life Balance and Confidence** – WWEE participants have reported that the skills they gained has led to increased work efficiencies, resulting in participants having more time to spend with their families, care for themselves, and be active in their communities—and using earnings to improve quality of life like basic water and sanitation services such as installing indoor plumbing. They have reported newfound confidence to share their ideas with others, form relationships with their peers, and trust themselves. Positive BBEST experiences have resulted in some graduates recruiting nearly 20 women each to enroll in future learning cohorts.



Joan has been an informal waste collector for 11 years. Through BBEST, she learned about the significant role informal waste collectors play in communities and was awarded \$984 to improve management of her waste collection business.

“After receiving a business grant from WWEE, my customers increased and my trade is now legitimate. My door-to-door collection business is authorized by the Barangay government. Before [the grant], I only earned Php 200 to 700 (\$4 to \$13) a day. Now, in only 3 hours, I can earn Php 600 (\$11) and earn more than Php 1000 (\$18) every day consistently.”

– Joan
BBEST Graduate and
Informal Waste Collector
Metro Manila

Above Photo: Joan and her family in Metro Manila. Photo: Giulia Soria/USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean

- **Strengthening Women’s Personal and Professional Networks –**

The networking opportunities afforded by WWEE enabled participants to forge close relationships with other women in their community with similar life experiences, and to develop formal working relationships with the local government and other partners in the waste system. For example, in Indonesia, one participant noted that as a result of the networks she developed through WWEE, she was able to join the Semarang City Waste Bank Association, giving her access to a larger network of women in waste and new buyers; and support from the government such as personal protective equipment, training, and access to a local government-managed social networking group where authorities share information about waste bank activities.



- **Advancing Safe Working Conditions and Increasing Understanding of Gender-based Violence –**

Through GBV training and survivor resources, WWEE is helping women to make waste collection, recovery, and recycling safer for themselves and women in their networks by engaging both women and men in GBV training sessions. WWEE training addresses GBV and provides professional psychological support (at no cost) for participants experiencing GBV or who are GBV survivors and offers resources if victims need additional support. For example, in Indonesia, a representative from the local government unit—the Regional Technical Implementation Unit of Women and Child Protection—attends all BBEST trainings to ensure women are aware of the local support services and resources available to them. Due to the supportive atmosphere that WWEE training creates, many participants have discussed their experiences for the first time.

- **Diverting Recyclable Materials out of the Waste Stream –**

The WWEE activity has resulted in the safe management of over 42.5 metric tons of plastic—or the equivalent of over 4.6 million plastic bottles—from leaking into the environment, in addition to other waste being diverted from the landfill. This reduces GHG emissions by 43.6 MT CO₂e by lowering the need for new plastic manufacturing and ensuring existing plastic is recycled responsibly.

USAID and its partners awarded Elena, a WWEE participant in the Philippines, with a \$2,858 grant to expand her junkshop, including a waste collection vehicle, personal protective equipment, and other tools—to collect more recyclables and increase her income.

“Before [the grant], our house didn’t have a sink or a toilet. But thanks to the grant, my family was able to have a sink and toilet installed in our house from the earnings we received from the business.”

– Elena
 WWEE Entrepreneur and
 Small Business Owner
 Metro Manila

ABOVE

Elena standing at her “junkshop”
 Photo: Giulia Sorial/USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean

Key Recommendations

The WWEE activity supports women waste collectors' capacity to participate meaningfully in the waste sector and advance economically through building their business skills, personal agency and confidence to make informed business decisions.

Key recommendations for WWEE success and replicability are:

- **Deliver Empowerment Training to Address Stigma and Health and Safety Risks.** Promoting gender equality in the waste sector goes beyond just increasing earning potential—it includes addressing stigma, lack of social capital, gender-based violence, health, and other safety risks that impact women's daily lives—to help them to reach their full potential. This whole-person approach is essential. For example, in Indonesia, USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean is working to facilitate eligibility for the WWEE graduates and their families to obtain free access to health facilities through the Social Security Administrator for Employment so that women can have additional security for themselves and their families.
- **Include a Business Incubator Component to Enable Success.** In addition to delivering empowerment training, offering a complementing business component can help women develop the business skills needed to sustain, and grow their businesses.
- **Adapt the Training to Participants' Needs.** Tailor curriculum to local contexts, challenges, and opportunities—as well as participant needs—such as modules that are appropriate for low or no-literacy audiences. For example, WWEE offered additional support such as childcare and stipends to offset missed earnings while women attended the BBEST training.
- **Work with Local and National Governments to Recognize Informal Waste Collectors.** It's important that municipal staff recognize informal waste collectors, especially women, for the waste collection services they provide so they can be integrated in the formal waste management system. For example, as a result of WWEE in the Philippines, Quezon City's local government unit has committed to supporting BBEST graduates by waiving business permits and providing cash grants to some of the women.



Tarina, a scrap dealer in Semarang, Indonesia
Photo: Giulia Sorial/USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean

- **Enable Waste Collectors to Share Lessons Learned.**

Learning exchanges enable participants to expand their networks, but also build on their coursework to foster business relationships with potential partners in the waste sector. For example, WWEE supported exchanges with BBEST graduates working in waste banks in Indonesia to share their learning with various PKKs (local women's groups) and waste bank managers in their communities for learning and future replication.

- **Provide Additional Coaching to Mentors and Trainers.**

All mentors who will serve as coaches to BBEST graduates should receive training prior to mentoring women—to ensure they are familiar with the WWEE approach, objectives of the activity, and expectations for their role. For future replication of WWEE, USAID implementing partners should have experienced BBEST trainers to coach them and go through practice training before any new trainers use the modules with BBEST participants.

Related Resources

[Women in Waste's Economic Empowerment Activity Factsheet](#)

[Gender Equality & Women's Economic Empowerment Factsheet](#)

[Women In Waste's Economic Empowerment: Building Skills and Confidence \(video\)](#)

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Cover Photo: Riza Santoyo, an informal waste collector turned business owner, was the first entrepreneur to be funded by the WWEE activity in Metro Manila, Philippines. *Photo: Giulia Soria/USAID Clean Cities, Blue Ocean*