

More and more local governments across South Africa are privatising their waste management systems. They are doing this because of national government's push to get the private sector more involved in providing basic services, like water and waste management. Municipalities are also privatising to promote black economic empowerment.

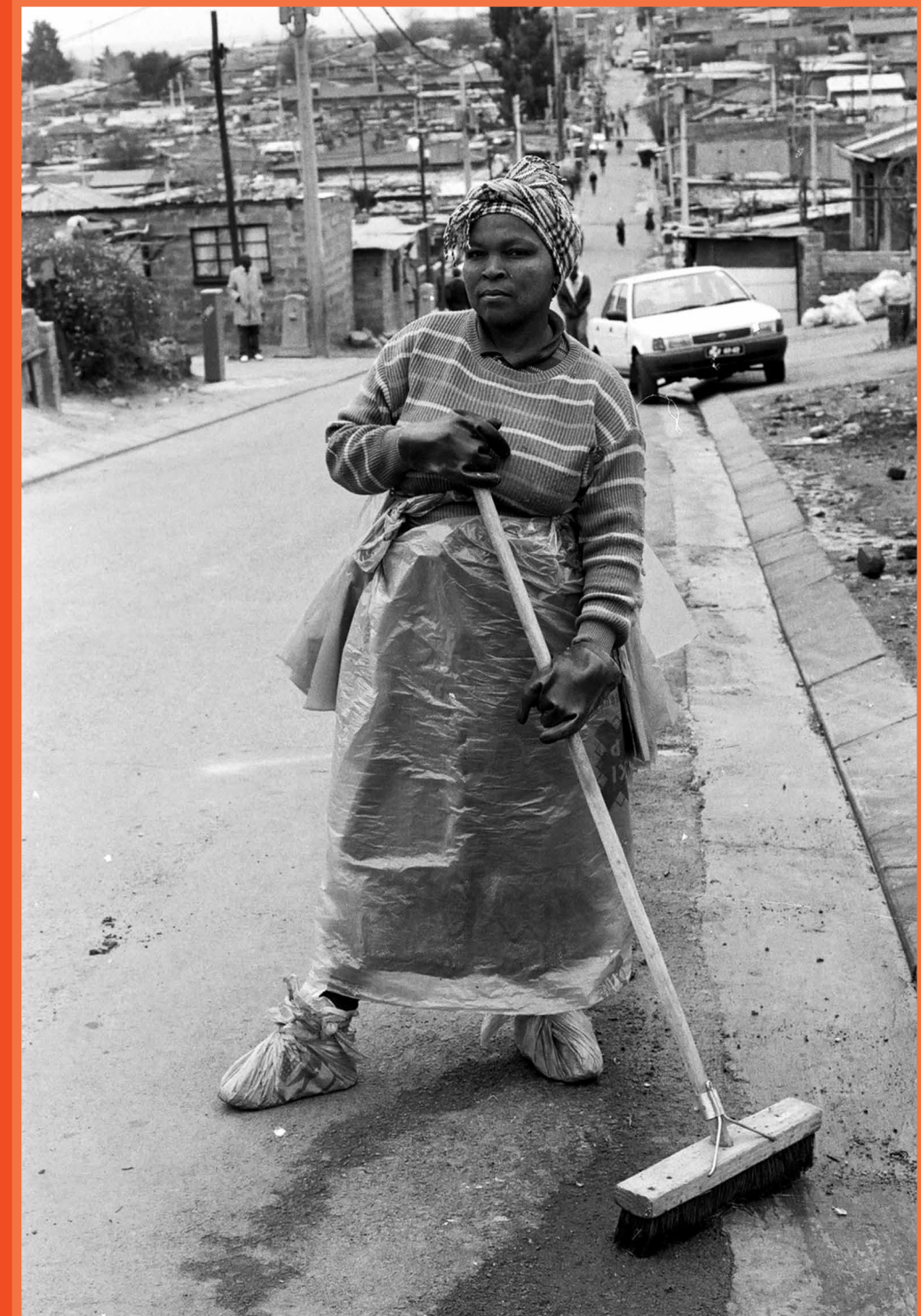
Who are the winners and who are the losers?

Research conducted in Thabazimbi, Sol Plaatje and Johannesburg municipalities shows that both workers and working-class communities suffer as a result of privatisation of basic services. It also shows how, because of the gender division of labour at work and at home, and because women waste management workers employed by private companies are largely left out of collective bargaining agreements, it is women workers who suffer most.



Dumping on women

Gender and privatisation of waste management



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The South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu) is the largest municipal union in South Africa. Samwu is at the forefront of struggles against privatisation. Samwu fights for gender equity in local government, and for services for all.

The Municipal Services Project (MSP) is a collaborative research initiative focusing on local government restructuring and privatisation. The MSP partners are: Samwu, CUPE, ILRIG, Queen's University, the University of the Witwatersrand, Equinet, and the Human Science Research Council (HSRC).

For more information on Samwu go to <http://www.cosatu.org.za/samwu/>
For more information on MSP and MSP publications go to <http://qsilver.queensu.ca/~mspadmin/>

Melanie Samson



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Gender and privatisation of waste management

by Melanie Samson



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This book is dedicated to:

Waste management workers throughout the world.

Your work is hard and undervalued, and your rewards are very few.

Women waste management workers.

You get the worst deal with cleaning work, paid and unpaid, at work and at home.

We hope this book will help change that.

Thank you

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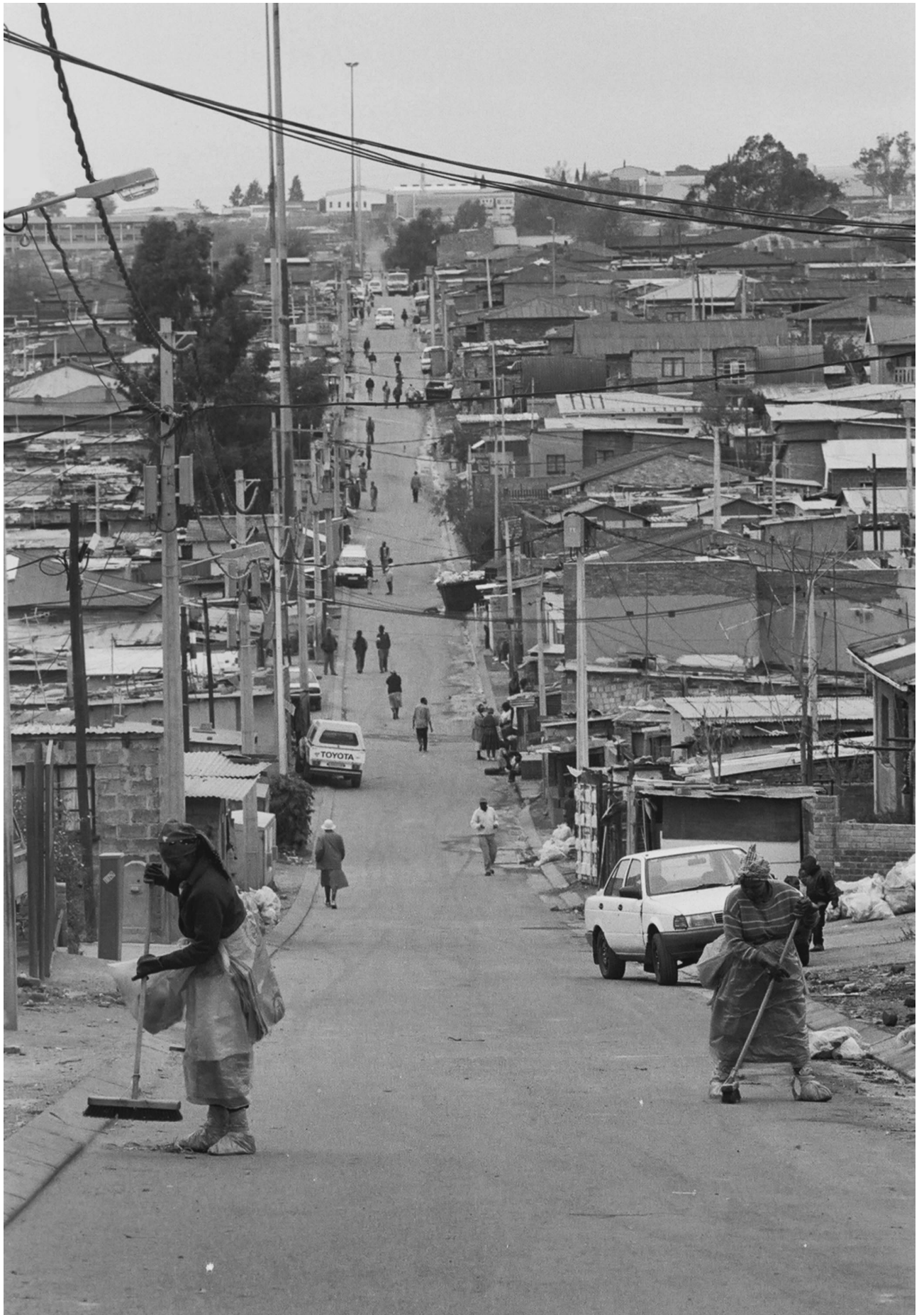
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From the Samwu General Secretary

Public services have been under attack in all parts of the world since the 1980s. Privatisation is a key element of the neo-liberal economic policies that have come to dominate the world since the Reagan/Thatcher era. Privatisation has caused severe cut backs in basic services. Ordinary citizens and public sector workers have borne the brunt of this attack.

Samwu has, for a number of years, been at the forefront of the resistance against privatisation. We have always taken an integrated approach to our anti-privatisation campaign. We include clear demands, an engagement strategy that extends beyond workplace bargaining arrangements, and we build links with local and international communities, workers and institutions.

Research has played a big part in helping us to argue against some of the pro-privatisation propaganda put out by big business and governments – who are ably supported by institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

This book is the result of one such research project. There have been many studies in recent years into the effects of privatisation. Almost without exception, these studies have shown that ordinary citizens and workers come off second best. Rising service charges, retrenchments, declining working conditions, and poor services are starkly reflected in these research reports. Not to mention the corruption monster.

This was, however, a special research project for two reasons. Firstly, it is one of the few studies looking at privatisation from a gender perspective. The research specifically asked questions about how women and men as waste management workers, and as working-class citizens, had been differently affected by privatisation. The research found that black working-class women came off worst, both in the jobs they got, and in the extra housework that bad service delivery created for them. This, once again, confirms why Samwu strongly opposes privatisation.

Secondly, a capacity-building component was built into the project from the outset. This was done through creating a project reference group made up of women Samwu members and administrators as well as representatives from head office. So, in addition to the project's very useful research findings we have also developed a team of women who have a deep understanding of key concepts like gender and privatisation. This is helping to take Samwu's gender programme forward. Through the project they also developed research skills, which has broadened the union's research capacity. They are all researchers in their own right!

The struggle against privatisation will be a long one. It will require strong organisation and clear political vision. Research will continue to be an important component of this struggle. I have no doubt that Samwu members, and the communities they are drawn from, other workers and our allies locally and internationally, will find this book a useful resource and tool. It will assist in our ongoing fight for a world based on meeting the needs of the majority as opposed to the profits of a few. A world where gender equality prevails.

Roger Ronnie

General Secretary

South African Municipal Workers' Union

November 2003



About this book

This book is based on research conducted in three South African municipalities – Thabazimbi in the Limpopo Province, Sol Plaatje in the Northern Cape and Johannesburg in Gauteng. We did the research to find out how privatisation of waste management services affected men and women differently. We wanted to find out if privatisation makes it harder for municipalities to promote equity between women and men.

The Introduction explains some of the key ideas that we use in the book. These concepts include gender, gender equity, gender division of labour, and privatisation. The Introduction also explains our research.

The chapters on Thabazimbi, Sol Plaatje and Johannesburg tell the stories of gender and privatisation in the three municipalities that we studied. Each chapter starts with a summary of the research findings. The Thabazimbi case study offers a good example of what happens when a municipality privatises its entire waste management service. Sol Plaatje is a good example of what happens when a municipality only privatises in the townships, and keeps on providing services in the suburbs and business areas. It raises important issues about black economic empowerment. Johannesburg was the first municipality in South Africa to turn its entire waste management department into a private company, which the municipality owns. This case study identifies problems with this model, which should be considered by other municipalities that are thinking about following Johannesburg's example.

The Summary of our research findings highlights key issues about privatisation generally, and about privatisation and gender in particular. It highlights the main issues that came out of the three case studies.

How to use this book

We hope that reading this book will help you to understand how to look at privatisation from a gender perspective – that is to see how it affects women and men differently. We hope it will give you useful information that you will be able to use in your work. Using this book:

- If you just want to get a basic idea of how privatisation of waste affects men and women differently, read the Introduction and Summary of our research findings.
- If you want to get a good understanding of particular issues about privatisation, you can read one or more of the case studies that focuses on the issues you are interested in. But if you do this we recommend that you read the Introduction first. It explains all of the key ideas that we use in the rest of the book.
- If you are doing a workshop on gender and privatisation you can copy sections from the case studies that relate to the theme of the workshop. For example, each of the three case studies includes sections on issues such as the wages and benefits of different kinds of workers, and the different kinds of jobs that men and women do.

Introduction



If no one picked up litter, swept the streets, or removed garbage from places like homes, businesses, schools and empty lots we would be in big trouble. We need waste management services to stay clean and healthy, and to live with dignity. The South African Constitution says that local governments must provide these services. Until recently most South African municipalities delivered waste management services themselves. However, for many years some municipalities, like Johannesburg have hired private companies to do at least some waste management jobs. But now, many more municipalities are following the path of privatisation.

The race to privatise

Since the early 1990s more and more municipalities have signed contracts with private companies to deliver waste management services for them. Municipalities got an additional push to do this in 1996. This was when the government decided to run South Africa's economy using an economic plan called the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution Strategy (Gear). Gear says that the private sector must be more involved in the economy. This includes delivering services that had mostly been done by government in the past. New laws have been passed that allow this to happen. One of these laws is the Municipal Systems Act. It sets out different ways that municipalities can involve private companies, and use private sector principles like cost recovery and profit generation, in service delivery. Because the national government has cut the amount of money that it gives to municipalities, many of them are struggling to find the funds needed for service delivery, and are looking to the private sector. National government found different ways to encourage them to do this. For example, it helped to set up the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Unit (MIIU). The MIIU provides municipalities with support, assistance and advice on making contracts with private companies. So we can see that there has been a huge push from government to involve the private sector in delivering basic services to citizens.

We can see that there has been a huge push from government to involve the private sector in delivering basic services to citizens.

Are women and men being treated differently?

The South African Constitution says that local government councils must promote development. It also says they must do all of their work in a way that promotes equity between men and women.

Gender equality and gender equity

Gender equity is not the same thing as gender equality. Gender equality means treating men and women in exactly the same way. But men and women have different needs. One reason for this is our biological differences. Another important reason is because of the different roles that we play in our households, communities and workplaces. To give men and women the same chances and opportunities, our different needs must be taken into account. Gender equity means treating men and women fairly. It means providing equal opportunities in ways that take our different needs into account.



Important groups in local government councils and municipalities agree that there must be gender equity between women and men. These groups include the South African Local Government Association (Salga), and the two main unions: the South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu) and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (Imatu). But is gender equity being achieved? So far not much research has been done to find this out. Many municipalities have begun to privatise services, but how has this affected women and men as workers and as citizens? Do private companies promote gender equity in all their work?

We did research on the privatisation of waste management to get answers for these kinds of questions. This book publishes our research findings. We hope it will help workers, shopstewards, local government managers, councillors, and political parties to promote gender equity. We hope this book will help people understand which issues to look at, and what kinds of questions to ask, to help them push for and achieve gender equity.

The municipalities we chose to research

We researched three municipalities because we wanted to be able to compare them. We wanted to find out whether privatisation had caused the same things in all three places. We knew that just because the same things happen in three municipalities it does not mean that they happen everywhere. But knowing about patterns can help others to look out for the same problems and issues in their municipalities. It can help them push for gender equity in a more effective way.

We did our research during 2002 and 2003 in the municipalities of Thabazimbi in Limpopo Province, Sol Plaatje in the Northern Cape, and Johannesburg in Gauteng. Each municipality had privatised in a different way:

- In Thabazimbi the transitional local council (TLC) signed a three-year contract with a private company called The Waste Group to deliver all waste management services in all parts of the municipality, including the suburbs, the townships and the business area.
- In Sol Plaatje the former Kimberley council used privatisation as a way to try to promote black economic empowerment. It signed a contract with a company called Billy Hattingh and Associates (BHA) and seven local entrepreneurs to deliver waste management services in the townships. Although BHA is no longer part of the scheme, the entrepreneurs are still contracted by the Sol Plaatje municipality. Municipal workers continue to deliver waste management services in the formerly white suburbs and business areas.
- In Johannesburg there is a multilayered privatisation process. The municipality turned its entire waste management department into a private company which it



owns called Pikitup. Pikitup contracts a large number of other private companies to help it deliver waste management services in Johannesburg.

In each municipality we asked questions about how privatisation had affected the quality of waste management services for different communities in the municipality. But our main interest was in finding out how privatisation had affected women and men waste management workers in the workplace and the home. This is because we wanted to find out the gender effects of privatisation.

What is privatisation?

The government says that privatisation is when a government sells things that it owns. An example of this is when the Johannesburg council sold the Johannesburg Gas Works, which it owned, to iGoli Gas, which is a private company.

Trade unions, like Samwu, that belong to the Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) say that privatisation is more than that. They say that privatisation also takes place when:

- The government contracts private companies to run certain parts of a service. This is called outsourcing.
- The government gets a private company to manage a government department or unit. This is usually called a management contract.
- The government gets community groups to do work that used to be done by the municipality.
- Government departments are changed into private companies, which are owned by government. In Johannesburg these private companies are called utilities, agencies and corporatised entities, or UACs.
- Government departments are changed into business units, which are completely separated from other departments in the municipality. These units are still owned by government but they operate like private businesses with the same kinds of profit incentives.

This book uses the wider definition of privatisation that unions use.

What is gender?

The word gender causes a lot of confusion. Many people think it is just another word for women. This is perhaps because when people talk about gender, or do gender research, they often end up only looking at and talking about women. Gender is not just about women. It is not even about individual women and men. It is about how society sees and treats groups of women and men differently.

We need to understand four things when we use the word gender.

- Gender is about differences between men and women that societies, not biology, make.
- Gender differences are about men and women being unequal.
- Societies create inequalities between men and women. These are kept going through all structures and institutions, like homes, workplaces, clubs, schools and places of worship.
- Gender is just one type of inequality. When we look at gender inequality we also have to look at other differences in our societies that affect us at the same time, like race and class.

Society creates gender differences

Some differences between men and women are from nature: they are biological. We have male bodies and female bodies. These are sexual differences. We cannot change our sexual differences, unless we have an operation.

Gender differences are not created by nature. The communities, cultures and traditions we live in make them. Every culture or society has strong ideas about what boys and men should do, and how they should be treated. And they also have strong ideas about what girls and women should do, and how they should be treated. Because societies make the different roles that men and women are expected to play, these roles are not all the same in all societies. But in many, women are expected to take almost full responsibility for managing households and seeing to the needs of all members of the households. They are also expected to be the main ones responsible for looking after children.

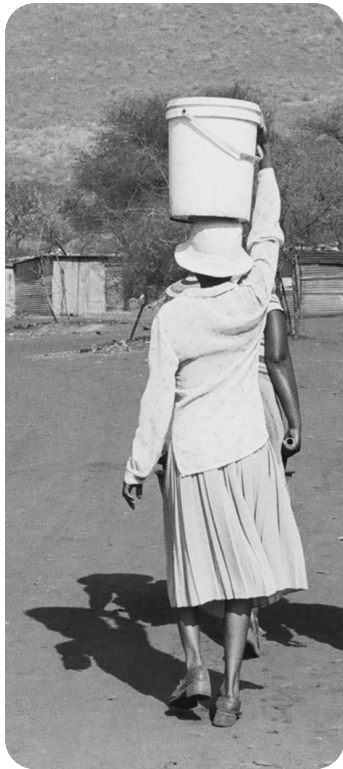
It doesn't matter who does them, but certain activities are seen as being male, and certain activities are seen as being female. For example, if a man stays home and takes care of the children, cleans the house, and cooks for the family, people say that he is doing a woman's job. Or they say that he 'helps a lot at home', instead of saying 'he shares the work at home'.

Because society, and not nature, creates gender roles, it is possible to change them. As with any other struggle to change inequality, this requires exposing injustice and struggling to bring about change. We can change gender roles at the big level of institutions by passing laws like the Employment Equity Act. This Act requires companies to give women jobs that in the past were only done by men. We can also change gender roles in our individual lives. For example, some men who are strong enough to reject their traditional male privilege choose to share the housework, so that they can put democracy into action in their homes. Often they have to put up with resistance or jokes from both men and women when they do this.

Gender differences make women and men unequal

The differences society creates between men and women make us unequal. Men, and things to do with men, are usually put above women and things to do with women. Men are associated with power and privilege. The things women do are usually given lower value than the things that men do.

For example, most people take for granted that men should do the important things when decisions and action need to be taken. We take it for granted that women do the things that are to do with the private world of home. Women are associated with being emotional, being weak, and being followers. Men are seen as clear headed, strong, and leaders. We almost always value what men do over what women do.



We almost always value what men do over what women do.

Gender differences are built in to our lives

Gender inequalities are kept going by the way we think about male and female roles. They are kept going everywhere because they continue to influence the roles and jobs given to men and women. This includes in the household, in the community, and in the economy. That is why we say that gender inequalities are structural – our society and its economy are based on them.

We have a gender division of labour in our households, in our communities, and in our economy. The gender division of labour is there because we assume that women do certain tasks and men do others. For example, almost all domestic workers in South Africa are black women. Almost all workers who build cars are men. In the past, almost all chief executives of companies were white men. This is changing to include more black men. Generally, the jobs that are open to women (and especially black women) are the worst paid, the least protected and the least valued. Women also do most of society's unpaid labour. This is because at home they are expected to take the main responsibility for doing housework, taking care of children and sick people, and generally keeping households going.

Gender division of labour

The gender division of labour is how society divides up work between men and women on the basis of them being male or female. It is about the kinds of jobs and activities that women are expected and allowed to do, and the kinds of jobs that men are expected and allowed to do.

Which women? Which men?

Society creates inequalities between men and women. But this gender inequality is only one type of inequality between people. Gender inequalities influence the possibilities and opportunities open to men and women. But so do other inequalities, like race and class. We have to look at gender together with other important differences. Otherwise we will not see the whole picture of the things that make people unequal. When we look at gender inequality, we must always also ask which women and which men are we talking about? Are we talking about rich white men? Rich African men? Working-class coloured women? Wealthy white women?

It is important to ask these questions because women from different races and different classes are not affected in the same way by policies like privatisation. This could be because the policy is put into action differently where they live. For example, in Sol Plaatje waste management was only privatised in the townships where working-class African and coloured women live. Or, it could be because they have different resources to cope. For example, women of all classes are usually responsible for taking care of their households. But wealthy women from every race can afford to hire domestic workers. They can hire domestic workers to do the extra chores that might be caused by privatisation. For example, if the streets are not properly swept, they can hire gardeners and domestic workers to make up for this. In townships, working-class women would have to do the extra work themselves.

Doing a gender analysis

When you do a gender analysis you try to understand how a policy or plan affects different kinds of men and women. It also means trying to understand whether the policy or plan uses inequalities between different kinds of men and women to succeed. To do a gender analysis of privatisation, we had to understand how privatisation works.

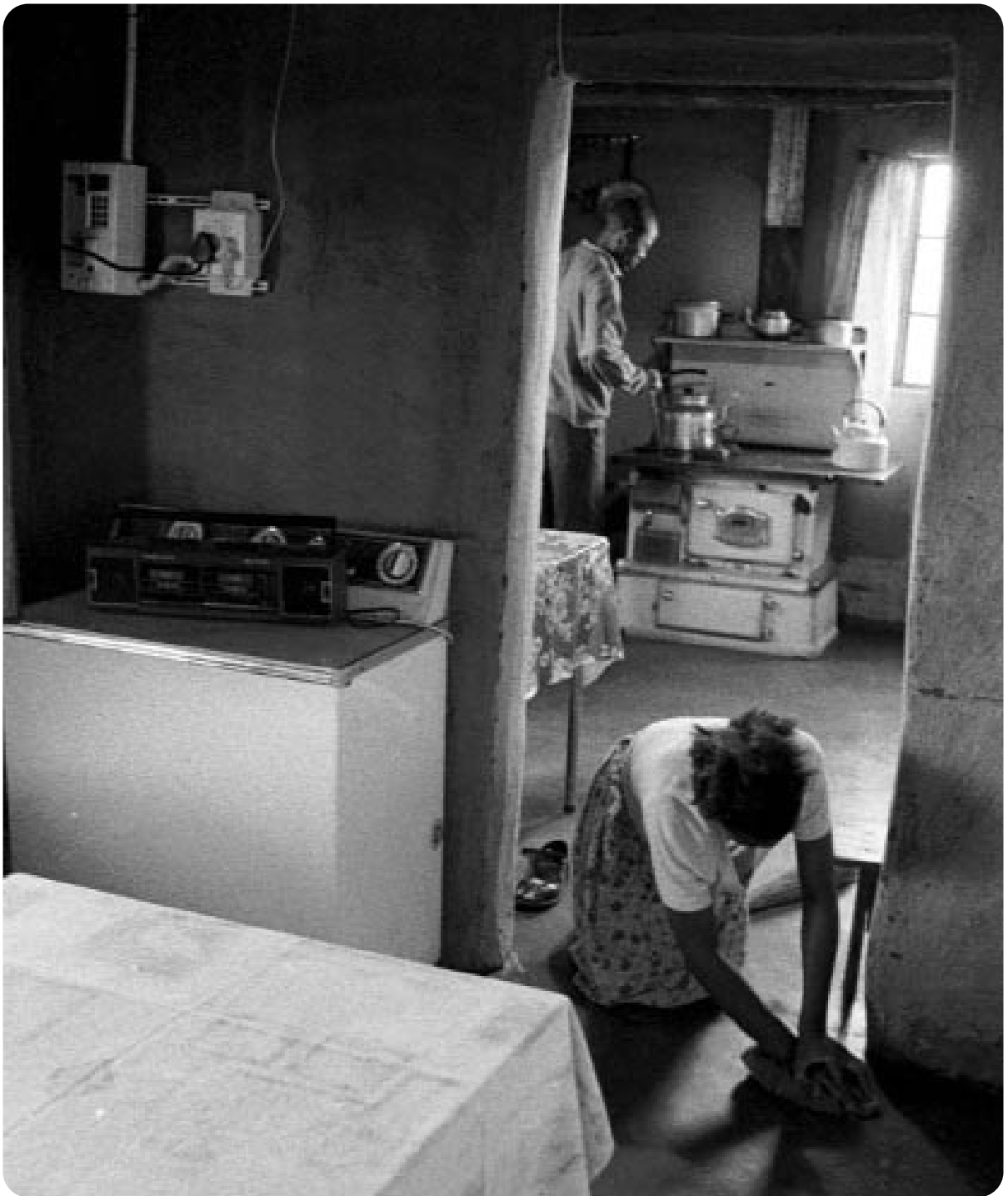
When you do a gender analysis you try to understand how a policy or plan affects different kinds of men and women.

We had to find all of the ways that men and women from different race and class backgrounds were affected by privatisation. We had to look for all the places where gender inequality existed. And we had to understand when, where and how private companies used gender inequalities for their own benefit as they took over the work from the municipalities.

Principles that guided our research

We used some principles to guide our gender analysis of privatisation in the municipalities:

- We did not only look at women. We did a survey and interviews with both men and women. We had to do this because gender has to do with men and women, and we needed to understand how privatisation affected them differently.
- We made sure that we found out the racial backgrounds of the waste management workers. We also looked at all of the different race and class areas of the municipality. We looked at the former black and white areas, working-class and wealthy areas, and business districts. We had to do this so that we could find out whether privatisation affected neighbourhoods with different race and class backgrounds differently. It also helped us to find out whether workers in the wealthy areas were better off than workers in the townships.
- We did not only look at the municipal waste management departments and private companies directly contracted by the municipality. We looked at all of the different organisations that delivered waste management services that the municipality normally provides. In our research this included: the municipality, private companies contracted to the municipality, poverty alleviation projects, volunteer groups, city improvement districts, and household members. We looked at what was happening to workers inside each of these organisations. And we also looked at how changes in one of these organisations affected workers employed by the others. For example, how were volunteer workers affected when a private company stopped doing certain work? Were they expected to do more free work to make up for work not being done by the private provider?
- We paid attention to the gender division of labour in all of these organisations. We did this so that we could see how privatisation affected men and women differently because of the different roles that they play and jobs that they do.



Some men who are strong enough to reject their traditional male privilege choose to share the housework.

How we got our information

We wanted to compare the effects of privatisation of waste management services in the three municipalities we chose. To compare properly, we had to make sure that we asked the same questions in the same way in all three municipalities. In each municipality we did:

Individual interviews: with trade union representatives, managers in private companies and municipalities, councillors, and community representatives.

Group interviews: with municipal waste management workers, and with workers employed by private waste management companies contracted by the municipality. We also did group interviews with volunteers and workers employed by poverty alleviation projects and city improvement districts.

A survey: we used a questionnaire to do a survey of waste management workers employed by the municipality and private companies contracted by the municipality.

We were able to check the information that came in from the survey with the information from the individual and group interviews that we did. Here is the breakdown of the research we did.

- In Thabazimbi we did 22 individual interviews and six group interviews. Because there were so few workers affected by privatisation we included all of them in the survey.
- In Sol Plaatje we did 26 individual interviews and nine group interviews. Because there were so many workers employed by the municipality and the entrepreneurs, we only included a sample of workers in the survey. Our sample was made up of the 90 workers that we interviewed for the survey.
- In Johannesburg we did 41 individual interviews, and 28 group interviews. Because there were so many workers employed by Pikitup and the private companies, we only included a sample of them in the survey. Our sample was made up of the 603 workers that we interviewed for the survey.

The case studies and their themes

Next we tell the stories about gender and privatisation of waste management in Thabazimbi, Sol Plaatje and Johannesburg. Each is different. But many of the issues that came up were the same. In the Summary of our research findings, we look at the key themes from all of the case studies. We hope this will help you to think about whether you have the same problems and issues in the municipality where you live and work, and in other municipalities that have followed the path of privatisation. ○



Privatising waste management in Thabazimbi



Thabazimbi at a glance

In November 2000, the Thabazimbi transitional local council (TLC) signed a three-year contract with a company called The Waste Group. The Waste Group's job was to deliver all waste management services in both the town and the townships. It had to collect rubbish from homes and businesses, sweep the streets, pick up litter, clean illegal dumping sites, and run the landfill site.

The Thabazimbi council's decision to privatise the town's waste management services did not bring about a better and less costly service for citizens as promised. Most of the people we spoke to, including municipal and private company waste management workers, business people and senior municipality staff, agreed that the municipality had done a better job before the private company was contracted. The private company employed too few staff and did not have enough equipment. So it could not deliver on its contract to keep the town and its surrounding townships adequately clean and tidy. This dumped more hard, unpaid cleaning work on township dwellers. Women suffered the most from this because they are the ones expected to do cleaning work at home. The municipality also ended up wasting money and resources. It paid The Waste Group every month, but it also used its own staff and equipment to help out The Waste Group, and to do things it forgot to include in the contract.

Women and men waste management workers were affected differently by privatisation. The Waste Group hired most of the workers who had worked for the municipal waste management department as casuals. It also hired some new workers. The permanent workers who had been employed by the waste management department did not have to go to the private company. They were transferred to other departments in the municipality. All of these workers were men. Only some of the men, but all of the women had to go and work for the private company. This was because all of the women were casual workers.

Once they got to the private company men and women workers had different opportunities. Because it held strong gender stereotypes, the company only hired women to do street cleaning. The "women's work" was in the lower paid jobs, which were less protected by collective bargaining agreements.

The company's waste management workers said they would far rather work for the municipality as permanent employees. Many of them had worked for the municipality in the past, so they were able to compare what it was like working for each. This case study looks at all of these issues to do with the impact of privatisation, and more.

About Thabazimbi

Thabazimbi is a small mining town in Limpopo Province. People have been mining the area's rich iron ore deposits since around 1500. It was when the then state-owned Iron and Steel Corporation (IsCOR) began mining in the early 1930s that Thabazimbi grew into a town. Up until 1958 Thabazimbi was South Africa's largest producer of iron ore. Mining strongly influenced the town's character. Because most miners are men there are more men than women in the town and 60% of the town's population is male. Thabazimbi's population is just under 70,000, with most of its people between 30 and 49 years old. It has a very youthful population, with almost one quarter being under 15 years old. Unemployment is 10% – which is low when compared to national figures. The mines are still the biggest employer, followed by agriculture and the service sectors. But mining is on the decline, and so the town has been trying to gear itself as a tourist destination. In light of this, having a sparkling clean town is very important for all the people of Thabazimbi.

The municipal area researched

After Thabazimbi privatised its waste management services to The Waste Group, new rural areas and towns were added to the Thabazimbi municipality. But these rural areas and towns were not included in The Waste Group's contract. Instead, the municipality continues to employ general workers to deliver waste management and other municipal services there.

Thabazimbi's story of privatisation

Many people were confused when the council decided to privatise its waste management service because the municipality was doing a good and cost-effective job. It all started in the late 1990s when, for the first time, the municipality had to take on responsibility for the town's landfill site, which is where all the garbage is taken to, dumped and pressed down. At the time, the Thabazimbi TLC did not have its own landfill site. The municipality used a landfill site that IsCOR owned and ran. The landfill site did not have a permit to operate, and it did not meet the standard required by environmental laws. So, IsCOR and the TLC did some studies and eventually found a new landfill site, which the municipality began to use in 1998. The TLC had never done this kind of work before. Instead of hiring new staff, and buying the necessary equipment, it contracted a private company to spread and cover the waste every day. But in June 1999, the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Unit (MIIU) inspected the new site and was unhappy with



how it was run. The TLC then decided to contract a private company, called The Waste Group on a monthly basis to manage and operate the landfill site. They did this without putting the contract out to tender.

About the MIIU

The MIIU was established in March 1998 to help promote the private sector getting involved in municipal services. The MIIU has two main objectives. To:

- encourage municipalities to get the private sector to invest in core municipal services, like waste management and water;
- provide funding to local governments so they can hire consultants to help them with everything to do with the privatisation process. This includes identifying what services should be privatised and drafting the contracts with the private companies.

Exploring the options

The TLC knew that it was not running the landfill site properly. It decided to approach the MIIU for funding to explore different options for managing the site. The TLC then contracted a group of companies, headed by V3 Consulting Engineers to do a feasibility study.

The aim of the study was to identify advantages and disadvantages of different possible ways to manage Thabazimbi's landfill site. Up until this point there had been no problem with the municipality's waste collection and cleaning services. But the consulting company was told to include these in the study, instead of just looking at the landfill site.

A good municipal service was being provided – so why change it?

The consultants' study found that the municipality was providing an efficient waste collection service from people's homes. Its only real criticism was that the consultants thought the service could be done in four days instead of five.

The report also said that the municipality's bulk waste collection service to businesses seemed to "be operating fairly well". It said an efficient street cleaning service was being provided. The consultants praised the municipality's waste management services, including how it was managing financially.

The consultants found that the TLC was doing a good waste management job compared with what private contractors could do. They said that the municipality would only save about R4,000 through privatising the whole system.

Despite all of these findings, it recommended that all the waste management services be privatised through one company. The council finally accepted this recommendation, but not easily.

There was a hotly contested process that the political parties on the TLC, municipal management, the South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu), and even the provincial government took part in.

A new public-private partnership between the council, its municipality and a private company was about to begin. Why, though, when one tried before had failed?

Unlearnt lessons

Although they were called casuals, these workers worked five days a week almost throughout the year.

The new public-private partnership between the municipality and a private company was not the first waste management partnership in Thabazimbi. In 1995, the council made a two-year service agreement with a company to do street cleaning seven days a week. This involved picking up litter and sweeping the streets. When the contract ended, they again put the contract out to tender. But the council found that it could provide a more cost-effective service than any of the private companies. So it did not renew the contract, and it started once again providing the street cleansing services. But in doing this, the municipality did not employ any more workers to do the work. The municipality's waste management workers had to add this work to the waste collection work they were already doing. Since this was clearly impossible, the municipality hired casual workers to make the work manageable. Although they were called casuals, these workers worked five days a week almost throughout the year.

The waste management workforce: before and after

In 2000, casual workers earned on average R806 a month, compared to permanent workers whose average wage was R1,469. Casuals did not get the same benefits as permanent workers.

Just before the contract was signed with The Waste Group the council employed:

- permanent – ten men and no women
- casuals – ten men and seven women.

Of the casuals, all of the women and most of the men were employed in the street cleaning section. All the workers were African.

The council benefited from casuals, who could be sent home when there was not enough work, or when the budget was running low. In 2000, casual workers earned on average R806 a month, compared to permanent workers whose average wage was R1,469. Casuals did not get the same benefits as permanent workers. They were not registered with the unemployment insurance fund (UIF), and they did not receive uniforms. Because they were always faced with the threat of losing their jobs, the casual workers felt they were forced to work even harder than the permanent workers. One woman who had worked for the municipality as a casual worker explained:

At the municipality, we were not working equally. Just because we were casuals we would just work even when it was raining... and the permanents would be in the yard waiting for the rain to stop, so that they could go and work. But we would be told to work...

When the new privatisation contract was signed, the casual workers were abandoned by both the municipality and the

union. Samwu's main aim was to make sure that the municipality redeploy the permanent workers into other municipal departments instead of retrench them. The union was successful here. But it left the casual workers to choose between looking for another job, potential unemployment and being transferred to The Waste Group.

Into the stormy future: a new public-private partnership begins

There were problems with the contract between the council and The Waste Group before it even started. It took many months for the council to finally agree to award the contract. And then just 15 days after it began, the African National Congress' party caucus demanded it be cancelled, but because they only made up half of the council they could not succeed.

The final contract was signed in October 2000 and was for three years, with the possibility of being extended for two more years. The contract was very long and complicated, and the council never seemed to fully understand what it had signed, or how it could deal with unsatisfactory service delivery. Because the council did not have a proper monitoring and evaluation system, it was difficult for management to make sure that The Waste Group did the job it had agreed to do. By 2002, there was still confusion as to when the contract could be renewed or ended. Many councillors, municipal managers and unionists mistakenly thought that the first three years would expire in September 2002. It seemed the council had signed a public-private partnership contract it did not have the skills or capacity to enforce. This had a bad impact on waste management workers and the municipality's citizens.

The council wanted the company to take over the entire waste management system, including street cleaning, domestic and business collection, and managing the landfill site. However, it had left some waste management tasks out of the contract, so the municipality still had to provide these services. But even when The Waste Group did not do a good job of services that were written into the contract, like street sweeping, the council did not take action. Instead, the municipality continued to use its own workers to do these services.

At the time of this research the municipality still had a team of workers who spent most of their time doing waste management work. The municipality was spending a lot of money on these workers and the equipment that they used, instead of demanding that the company do the work for which it was paid. There were other costs of this privatisation deal that had not been included. Workers and their communities carried these costs; and women bore them more than men did. We will look at this next.

Savings through privatisation. What savings?

The consultants said that the municipality would save R4,000 a month by privatising. But when the contract was signed, none of the permanent municipal workers was retrenched. The consultants had not taken into account that workers would do all they could to save jobs. The union negotiated for them to be redeployed to other departments in the municipality, so there were none of the expected savings there. They also had not included the cost of the team of workers and vehicles that the municipality still used to do waste management work. The cost to the municipality of redeploying workers to other departments, and still delivering waste management services showed that, at least in this case, privatisation was not cheaper.

Things change and yet they stay the same: gender and race

Women workers: abandoned by council and the union



Men and women waste management workers were affected differently by the transfers to other departments that took place when the municipality started its contract with The Waste Group. Samwu only negotiated on behalf of the permanent workers for redeployment within the municipality. All of the women municipal waste management workers were casuals, and so they were not included in the negotiations. The three casuals who did manage to get jobs with the municipality during the privatisation process were men. This meant that 100% of the women waste management workers were forced to leave their municipal jobs, as they were all casuals. They were all given the choice of joining The Waste Group or looking for another job. 75% of the men municipal waste management workers were saved from this fate because they were transferred to other departments. So, from the very beginning the privatisation process was highly gendered – with men and women being differently affected because council had only employed women as casuals. It was clearly mostly women workers who were the losers in the council’s privatisation process.

Gender division of labour at The Waste Group



There was a big gender division of labour in The Waste Group. When the workers were transferred from the municipality, some of the men were promoted to work as loaders, putting garbage bags on trucks. When we did our research more than half of the men worked in collection, collecting garbage from households and businesses, or at the landfill site. But all of the women employed by The Waste Group worked in street cleaning, except for one woman who worked at the landfill site.

The men who worked in street cleaning picked up litter but did not sweep. It was also like this when they worked for the municipality. The men said this was how the workers decided to divide the work because women like sweeping.

Sector	Permanent		
	Male	Female	Total
Cleaning	4	8	12
Refuse collection	4	0	4
Landfill	1	1	2
Total	9	9	18

Women like sweeping – because men don't want to do it

The strong gender division of labour in waste management services was based on deep-rooted and narrow ideas that people have about what women and men can and cannot do. The company's project manager also held such gender stereotypes. He said loading bags and working on the truck was too strenuous for women. He said: "I personally think [that for] some jobs the women are better and some the men are better."

But as the one senior black woman in municipality management pointed out, this is not true.

Women are faced with really difficult menial jobs that they do... They have been for many years ploughing the fields... There is nothing as hard as that. I can imagine them picking up waste and loading it onto a truck. And they have the determination that anyone who's doing a particular job has. So it should not be based on physical strength and non-physical strength.

Men workers and even men councillors interviewed were clear that sweeping was the best job for women, because it is a job that they are used to doing at home. They did not challenge this traditional division of labour in households, which makes women far more responsible than men for time-consuming and unpaid housework. Said one man councillor:

I think, irrespective of what politics dictate now, there are some things that are women's work and some things are [men's work]... I mean it's in normal life you get many times more housewives than you would get men doing housework, okay?... it's always been like that.

Men benefit from these arrangements, so it is not surprising that they want to keep them going. The gender division of labour in The Waste Group meant men and women workers were differently affected by changes in staff numbers, technology, how work was organised, wages and benefits.

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Apartheid alive in the new South Africa

During the period in which the research was conducted there was a clear racial division of labour in The Waste Group. All of the workers were African, and the project manager was white. He was 19-years old, and his highest qualification was matric. His father had been head of technical services in the municipality, and helped him to get the position, which had not been advertised. Before he was appointed, two men and one woman worker had been acting as supervisors. But they were demoted on his arrival. Yet the young man relied heavily on the former supervisors. He admitted that he knew almost nothing about waste management. The workers felt that bringing in a very young, inexperienced white, man supervisor was part of a company strategy to use race and gender to control them. They said:

Our employer came and told us that because we always go to the municipality when we have a problem, he is going to hire us a raw farm boer with green eyes who will be able to deal with us...

The project manager went home on the weekends to the family farm. Soon after the research was completed he inherited the farm and quit his job with The Waste Group. According to a The Waste Group manager, the three former supervisors were put back in their positions.

Less of everything, except workload

Workers were especially concerned about the changes that the private company brought about in organising the work. Nothing turned out for the better for workers or the community. Because of the gender division of labour it turned out to be especially bad for women.

Changes in technology and service delivery

The Waste Group made changes in the vehicles and equipment used to deliver waste management services in Thabazimbi. It used the same vehicle for domestic and bulk business collection instead of using different vehicles, like the municipality did. This change caused a poorer service delivery and created harder work for the workers. They said:

In a truck, the municipality people used to collect garbage in the streets only. There was a tractor that used to take bigger dustbins; that is why the work then was not the same as now. So here we are supposed to collect garbage in the streets and collect those big dustbins. And then there is only one lorry, which starts in town, and then has to come all the way from town and collect all the big dustbins. So it is impossible.

In the past the municipality used a tractor to collect waste from the houses in Ipelegeng, one of Thabazimbi's townships. However, the streets in Ipelegeng were too narrow for The Waste Group truck, so workers had to carry the garbage to the ring road, where the truck picked it up. This greatly increased the workload and strain on workers.

The vehicle shortage was made worse by vehicle breakdowns. The municipality repaired its own vehicles. But the company had to arrange for repairs. This meant delays, since it had a vehicle shortage, and a poorer refuse collection service for residents. Workers said:

With the municipality we used to collect these plastic bins all over town, the two or three of us. At around two in the afternoon, the tractor came and we removed the plastics from the spot and sent them to the landfill. Unfortunately with The Waste Group that is impossible. We gather the plastic bags and place them at corners for collection later. The bags remain overnight and dogs tear them, and that makes our work very difficult. The following day the plastics are scattered all over the place and everything looks like a mess.

This of course meant their hard work was undone. Said one worker:

I feel like I am working like a fool. Because I spend time gathering the rubbish and placing it on the street corners. And the following day instead of

The streets in Ipelegeng were too narrow for The Waste Group truck, so workers had to carry the garbage to the ring road, where the truck picked it up. This greatly increased the workload and strain on workers.



The bags remain overnight and dogs tear them.

me continuing with the job, I am stuck and have to redo what I have done the previous day.

Because the trucks broke down often, the men were often forced to work long hours overtime, usually without extra pay. This gave them less time for leisure. And for those who did do housework, it meant they had less time for this, or that someone else would have to do it.

The changes in technology and work organisation affected the men the most since only men worked in collection. But it also affected other workers, as the women and men from cleaning were expected to help move the bins in Ipelegeng.

The work became harder

The Waste Group employed 30% fewer workers than the municipality had employed to do the same work. The street cleaning section, where most of the women worked, was hardest hit by the staff shortage. In addition The Waste Group only hired casuals when its workers were on leave or absent. In the municipality, more casuals had been hired to help when the workload was too much, and it did this regularly.

When we were with the municipality they would hire extra hands to help us clean the town as expected and after that objective was achieved the extra hands left us to continue with our work.

With Waste Group it is a different story. You work your heart out with no extra hands to help you.

Because The Waste Group employed too few workers, it was impossible to provide an adequate service. Knowing this lowered the workers' spirits:

If I clean and it never gets clean I do not feel good.

Waste Group must hire people so that we can do the job effectively... When they tell them to hire people they refuse.

Workers said they had greater job satisfaction when they worked for the municipality. There at least they felt able to do the job properly. The staff shortage was one of the main reasons why some streets in the municipality were not even being cleaned. Instead of insisting that The Waste Group do the job it was paid to do properly, the municipality stepped in and regularly sent workers to do it – at its own cost.



Multi-tasking: having to do more jobs

When the workers were still employed by the municipality, those who were in street cleaning only did litter picking and sweeping. But this changed with The Waste Group. Because there were fewer workers, and also changes in the number and types of waste collection vehicles, management expected workers to do a greater range of jobs. This disrupted workers' work patterns, lowered the quality of the street cleaning service, and increased the physical strain on the

mainly women street cleaning workforce. Several of the workers said:

We are working strenuously because we are not doing one job. We are strained by dustbins. With the municipality, a tractor would just come and pick up. But we are doing the Iscor location [Ipelegeng], and have to move the bins to the ring road, as the truck cannot enter the streets. On Wednesday we do the municipal location and we also pick up papers and sweep – just the two of us.

We can sweep today... tomorrow we do not sweep, we just pick up papers. And on Wednesday we do not pick up papers, we pick up dustbins at the municipality location. On Monday we do not sweep and we pick up dustbins.

Once again, because most street cleaning workers were women, it was women who were worst affected by this multi-tasking.

Longer working hours

Workers in The Waste Group worked five days a week as part of their regular working week. But because there were not enough workers at The Waste Group, a larger number of workers worked overtime on the weekends than when they worked for the municipality. Women worked overtime for the first time. When the municipality employed them, only the men casuals worked overtime on weekends. In 2002, both men and women workers of The Waste Group regularly worked two weekends each month. Although the workers appreciated the extra income, some said the overtime hours were not properly reflected on their payslips. Several of the women workers said that it was difficult to combine long working hours with their domestic responsibilities, as their husbands were not willing to baby-sit.

Scared at work

The staff shortage also meant workers did not feel safe doing street cleaning. As one of the men workers said:

You will find that they place you on the roads that are lined by trees, and they will not give you somebody to work with. What if I get sick on the road? Who will see that I am sick and have collapsed on the deserted road? What if a speeding car strikes me as I try to cross the road? Who will see that a car knocked me down?

Most of The Waste Group workers said their working environment was not very safe. For women it was worse, being more vulnerable to sexual assault and rape. The women said it was worse still on weekends:

When we work, we work on a road that goes to the bush. It is on a weekend and there are no people who use that road on a weekend. You will just see a man coming from the bush. And there are people who rape women there.

Wages, benefits and conditions of employment

Almost all of The Waste Group workers said they would rather be permanent workers at the municipality. The big differences in wages and benefits paid by the municipality and the private company were one of the main reasons for this. Next we look at these differences between public and private employer.

Working for less

The workers who were casuals at the municipality were hired as permanent workers by The Waste Group – something the company said it was proud of. But this did not

“Sometimes when I got home and told my husband that I was not paid yet, he beat me [and said] that I was lying.”

bring about a big improvement for most of the workers.

The Waste Group workers complained that they often received their pay late. They had gone on unprotected strikes just to get their pay, without the help of a union. At least they received a proper pay slip with details of payments and deductions. However, they said their wages were very low. Women workers' wages were the lowest.

All of The Waste Group men, and all the women except for one, were their household's main breadwinner. Almost all of the workers sent money to another household on a regular basis. On average the women workers each supported 6.3 people, and the men supported 4.5 people – so women's wages in Thabazimbi had to stretch further. It was extremely difficult for workers to provide for their families on such low wages.

In 2002, many of the women earned R800 a month. The average wage for men was higher, and was a big improvement on the wages that they had earned as men casuals for the municipality. In 2002, the men took home on average R1,406 a month, which was not much less than what the permanent workers had earned in the municipality. The differences in average wages earned by men and women were because of the gender division of labour. Loaders and drivers in collection, and the worker in charge of the landfill site earned more than workers employed in street cleaning. All of the workers in these higher paying jobs were men.

The men and women faced earning low and late pay differently. Men workers said that they didn't feel like real men because they could not provide adequately for their wives and girlfriends. One man's wife had abandoned him because he was unable to support her. But women workers faced more direct and dangerous consequences. Said one: “Sometimes when I got home and told my husband that I was not paid yet, he beat me [and said] that I was lying.”

The women were also open to emotional abuse because of their low wages. But they kept going because they knew that even their small income was helping:

Sometimes he [my husband] would tell me that my work is just useless – it does not help with anything... I just think that my work helps me because I am able to send my child to school. I did not go to school because my parents never sent me to school. So I just want my child to be educated.

Because they earned low wages it was hard for The Waste Group workers to pay for municipal services, especially with the increase in food costs. Workers were being forced to choose between buying food and paying for water and electricity. At the time of the research, almost half of The Waste Group workers had arrears for either water or electricity. Only a quarter of those workers who stayed at the municipality were in the same position.

Benefits: not much better at all

As mentioned earlier, the casuals who were employed by the municipality had not received any benefits. When The Waste Group told them that they were permanent, they expected to receive the same kinds of benefits as the municipal workers. But this was not to be. The workers got very little. Management said the workers all received annual and sick leave, an annual bonus, and that UIF deductions were made. Although half of the workers said that they were members of a union, they did not know the name of the union, and it did not help them. So there was no one that they could turn to for help with these problems.

It was not company policy to provide workers with a provident fund. A senior manager noted that some of those workers who came under the Road Freight Bargaining Council could join the provident fund, and that some of the workers had done so. This applied to workers who either drove or worked directly with trucks, like loaders and operators who operate the machines that help load garbage on the truck. He said that they could choose whether to join the provident fund. In fact, all workers registered with the Road Freight Bargaining Council must be registered for the provident fund. Only one of the workers with a provident fund was a woman.

The workers had not received any technical or adult basic education and training, either from the municipality or from The Waste Group. And they did not think that The Waste Group would provide them with benefits, despite its promises.

Permanent jobs: what's permanent about this?

The Waste Group workers did not feel secure in their jobs. Their wages were low, and they didn't have full benefits, they didn't believe that they were really permanent. As one worker said:

We are not sure if we are permanent or casual. Firstly, when they say you are permanent you are supposed to qualify for all your rights as a worker. The benefits that are given to permanent staff must also be given to you. But here we do not see that.

Their job insecurity was made worse because workers knew that The Waste Group only had a three- to five-year contract. The municipality workers, they said, were more truly permanent, and had better benefits: "Because the municipality is a government, it has more benefits than The Waste Group."

Municipal workers are protected by the agreements negotiated by unions and local government representatives in the South African Local Government Bargaining Council, and in different municipalities.

Unionised municipal workers had fought long and hard to secure minimum wages and benefits for themselves. But this bargaining council does not cover private companies.

A different council, called the Road Freight Bargaining Council, has agreements on wages and benefits for workers who work with trucks. This includes drivers, loaders and operators employed by private waste management companies.

The Waste Group was registered with this bargaining council, and had registered the workers who qualified to join. But all of these workers were men. None of the women did jobs that were covered by the Road Freight Bargaining Council, or any other bargaining council. This is why, on average, the wages and benefits of the women were much worse than the men's.

"Because the municipality is a government, it has more benefits than The Waste Group."

Equipment? Bring your own!

The municipality provided casual workers in cleaning with the equipment that they used. Workers were happy with this. One worker, now working for The Waste Group, said: “We were getting them [tools]. We were getting a wheelbarrow, a broom, shovel to pick up dirt.” But most of the workers said this changed for the worse when they joined The Waste Group. They suddenly found the company expected them to pay out of their own pockets for equipment and clothes – and this on very small wages. The workers in street cleaning got bad quality and not enough equipment.

We do not have tools that we work with. We sweep and we bring things from home. The only thing that we use that belongs to The Waste Group are brooms.

Even the ones who are sweeping in town, they do not have things to pick up litter – they just use a box. When they tell Waste Group to buy them things that they can use, Waste Group says that it does not have money; they must just use boxes.

When they come they expect to see that you have raked and the place is clean, but they do not buy a rake. So you have to get a rake and then use it.

It was mainly women who suffered with equipment problems because they all worked in street cleaning. This meant that they paid towards equipment that the company was supposed to buy, thereby subsidising the company's costs.

The company expected them to pay out of their own pockets for equipment and clothes – and this on very small wage.

Protective clothing? Wear your own!

There were some problems that affected both men and women workers equally, such as the lack of protective clothing and equipment. The company gave all its workers one pair of overalls, and a few men workers said they received two. About two-thirds of the women and one-third of the men were given raincoats, and just under a quarter of all workers had been given one or two dust jackets. The Waste Group did not give workers any other protective clothing. The project manager said he had ordered them in August 2002, but by November 2002 they had not arrived. Four men and one woman had received one mask each from the company. Almost all of the workers had received one or two pairs of gloves. But they said this was not enough, and it caused a serious health hazard for them. This upset them, as one worker said:

Those of us who are picking up dustbins can get illnesses because some of the dustbins have maggots... We do not have things to protect ourselves... I have even taken my own clothes and worked with them.

Workers were subsidising the company through being

“Some time ago I used my hands to pick rubbish and I handled faeces, can you imagine? Sometime a broken glass tore through my hand and I was unable to find a good medical service.”

forced to wear their own clothes and shoes at work. When they worked as casuals at the municipality, they received basic items such as gloves. They were given another pair when these wore out. The Waste Group workers did not receive enough gloves, which put their health and safety at risk – as well as their dignity.

If gloves are torn, you should know that you would have to use your hands to pick rubbish. Some time ago I used my hands to pick rubbish and I handled faeces, can you imagine? Sometime a broken glass tore through my hand and I was unable to find a good medical service. As these things happen they made us feel so bad that we are not cared for as human beings.

No place to wash

The contract between the municipality and The Waste Group said very clearly that The Waste Group was supposed to provide its own depot where workers could meet before work and after work. Yet The Waste Group had neither a depot nor an office in Thabazimbi. This meant workers had to wash and change at home. They had to travel home dirty and smelling of garbage. They used their own money to pay for water to clean themselves. This was another way that they were subsidising the company's costs.

The vehicles were parked at the landfill site, and the equipment used for street cleaning was stored in the municipal office. It seemed that the municipality did not charge The Waste Group rent for this. When they were on duty the workers in town used public toilets. Those working in the township had to ask residents to use their toilets, or use those in abandoned houses. The landfill site did not have a working toilet. The workers who worked and also lived there had to relieve themselves at the landfill.

A worse service offered – especially in the townships

The quality of waste management service had gone down with privatisation. This put an extra burden on citizens, especially from poor homes. Most of The Waste Group workers and the redeployed municipal workers thought that the quality of waste collection services in the areas where they lived had gone down since The Waste Group started. We interviewed workers, councillors from all three political parties, municipal management, representatives of trade unions, and the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL). Almost everyone said they were concerned about the quality of service. The municipal manager said that they had received many complaints.

You know, their vehicles are always standing. They don't pick up at the correct times, and the rubbish is laying around until 10 or 11 o'clock in the day.

The quality of service had clearly become worse in town as well as in the townships. As one of the redeployed municipal workers said:

Even in town there's litter, they do not clean well. Sometimes when we work there whites tell us that the municipality must come and clean. And when we say it is Waste Group which is working there, they say they are not doing their job.

Of course, business representatives were very worried about this, because Thabazimbi was trying to promote itself as a tourist destination. Workers still felt that white and wealthier areas received a better service, and were cleaner than the townships. Workers said when they finished working in town they were taken to the wealthier (former white) suburbs to provide extra services there.

Workers said it was unfair that they delivered a poor service to themselves and their community. They said people who lived in the township should not have to live in a dirty area. They also felt they did not have the power to change the situation.

More (unpaid) work for women



Privatisation increased the women workers' workload at the workplace and at home. This is because like other South African women, women waste management workers are more likely to be responsible for housework and childcare than men.

Spreading sickness

Poor collection services created health hazards, particularly for children. In the township there are few playgrounds and facilities for children. Children are attracted to play in a skip full of waste, or even with bags left uncollected on the road. They get cuts and illnesses from this.

The other problem is that their children are playing in these dumping sites, because now we find that most children are presenting with septic sores that have just originated. We cannot trace where they originate. When you ask the parents, 'Where are the children playing?' they say, 'They are playing with this dumping site of The Waste Group because The Waste Group is not collecting the refuse.'



Most of the men workers kept to the traditional male privilege of leaving women to deal with the problems created by a poor waste management service. Few men we interviewed were the main person responsible for caring for children in their households. The women workers spent all day trying to provide a high quality service under difficult conditions. And then they dealt with the effects of a poor collection and cleaning service when they returned home.

Free cleaning services: unpaid and done by women

The women workers interviewed all said that they either woke up at five and cleaned the yard, swept and picked up papers, or that they did these tasks after work. Some were single, but others lived with male partners. When asked why their husbands and boyfriends did not share this work with them one woman said: "He says that he doesn't know that men are supposed to sweep. It's a woman's job. But when I am sick he cleans."

"He says that he doesn't know that men are supposed to sweep. It's a woman's job."

Along with sweeping their yards, women also usually swept the street in front of their house. Once again, without being acknowledged or paid for it, women were picking up the work that the private company was paid to do but did not do properly. They also bore the brunt of the council not taking this up with The Waste Group.

Just over half of the redeployed men workers lived in municipal hostels. In the past the municipality swept the yard and picked up litter at the hostel. However, The Waste Group did not provide this service. No one was cleaning the

hostel area, and workers said it was very dirty. When asked why they did not clean it themselves, the workers responded that it was The Waste Group's job: "If The Waste Group can go we will clean it, but when they are still working we would never clean it."

Unlike the women, the men refused to provide free labour to do work that The Waste Group was being paid to do.

Those men who did live with their families in Thabazimbi were often responsible for taking out the rubbish. But if it was not collected, it was the women in their households who dealt with the problem. When asked why they did not sweep and pick up litter at home, even though they did this in their paid job, one of the men who used to work in street cleaning was clear:

The wife and children are there, they sweep. I will not sweep... No, I will not help them. When you help them, you make them think that they are the ones who work. I am the one who works and brings food. I give them food to eat. Their duty is to sweep. Like when you are hired to sweep, that white person has hired you to help with sweeping. So when I am home, that woman is my servant, she must sweep. She must not just get money for nothing.

This man's view that housework is not real work is common. It undervalues all the housework that women do which they are not paid for, but which keeps homes and communities going.

It was not only women waste management workers who swept the streets in front of their houses. It was like this in the community as a whole. As a senior woman manager in council noted:

Men never dirty their hands with dirty work... unless it's something that is going to depict him as a hero... Going to pick up rubbish, I mean who would... commend you for having picked up a bag of dirt? Nobody.

One of the men councillors went so far as to acknowledge that women in the townships were providing the municipality with a free labour force:

But as part of our culture even before we used to clean in front of our houses. Most of the people are sweeping even the streets. Most women are sweeping the streets without any remuneration from the council. That's what they are used to doing... and people are not even aware that what they are doing is the responsibility of the municipality. But on the other side for the council it's a benefit... It's a benefit because we don't have to hire more people.

Unlike the women, the men refused to provide free labour to do work that The Waste Group was being paid to do.

"Most women are sweeping the streets without any remuneration from the council. That's what they are used to doing... and people are not even aware that what they are doing is the responsibility of the municipality."

Better with the municipality

It is not surprising that almost all of The Waste Group workers would prefer to work for the municipality. As one woman worker said:

We would like to work with the municipality because Waste Group does not have a future. Our future is in the street if we work for Waste Group. So the municipality is more reliable, it will give us all the things that we need which Waste Group is unable to give us.

Workers believed there could be no job security, or truly permanent jobs, in a

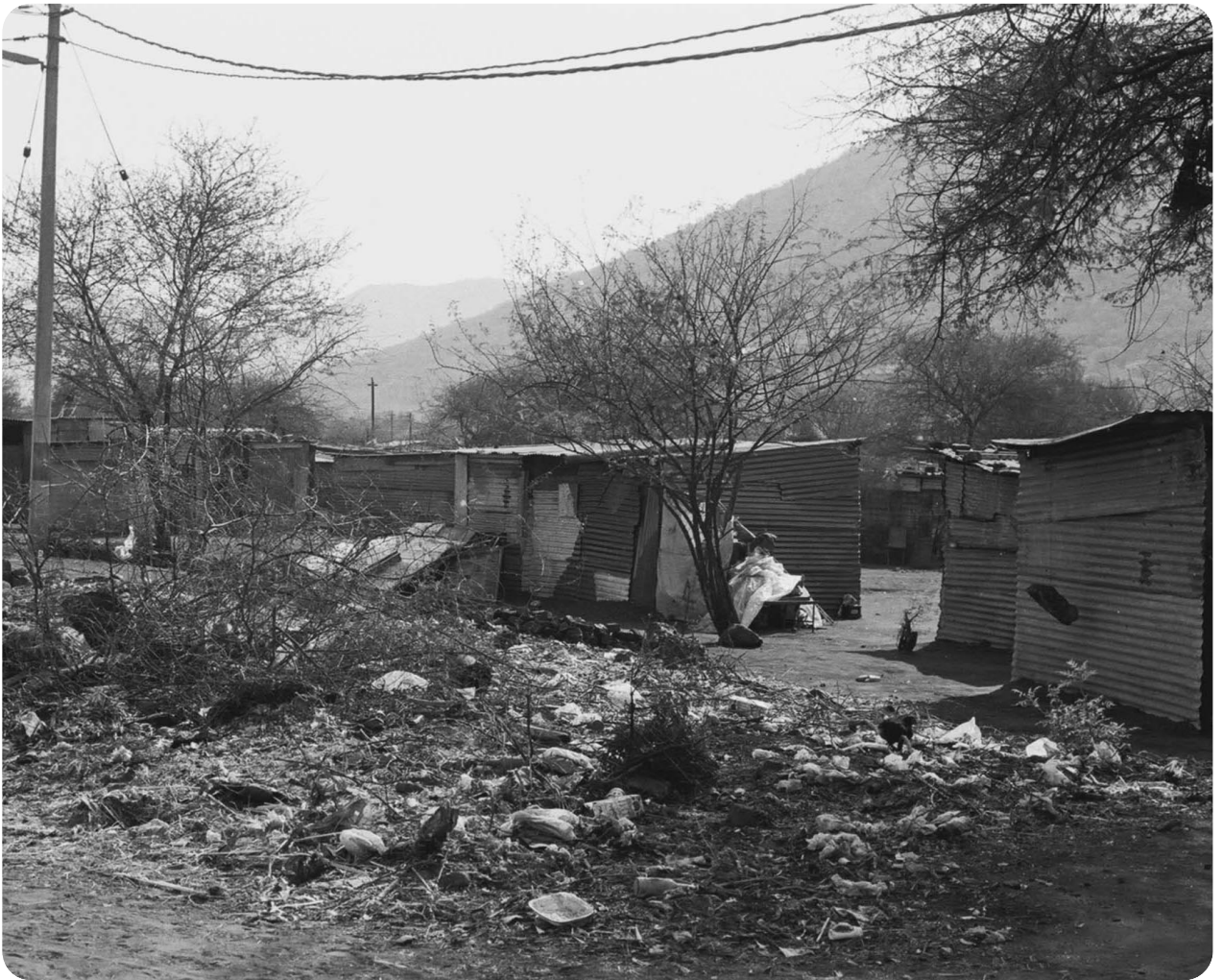
private company. They said this because a company only has a fixed term contract with the municipality. But if they went back to the municipality, workers said it would have to be as permanent workers.

Those who stayed with the municipality did not regret their decision. They said:

Waste Group is a subcontract... The Waste Group salary is very low. So I am thinking that if I worked with Waste Group for five years and the municipality does not take me back, where am I going to work?

The workers thought that the municipality was a better employer and a better service provider. All of the workers employed by both The Waste Group and the municipality would rather the municipality provided services where they lived. From their experiences, waste management workers in Thabazimbi clearly rejected privatisation. ○





Poor waste management services mean more unpaid work for residents.

Privatising waste management in Sol Plaatje



Sol Plaatje at a glance

The story of waste management privatisation in Sol Plaatje starts in 1994, when the municipality was still called Kimberley. The Kimberley city council privatised waste management services in its black townships. It did this in a public-private partnership with a white-owned company. In this scheme, the company contracted garbage collection, street sweeping and some other waste management services to entrepreneurs.

The entrepreneurs were local black small-business people. When there were problems with the scheme, the council cancelled it and started a new partnership directly with the black entrepreneurs. This partnership still existed when we did our research. The council did not privatise services to the former white residential and business areas. Many people we interviewed felt that the entrepreneurs did not provide a good enough service, and that there was still apartheid in the provision of waste management services.

Despite the many problems with the partnership with the entrepreneurs, the council has kept it going. This is because the council has been more committed to empowering a few black entrepreneurs than making sure black working-class areas get good service. Workers have also suffered as a result of privatisation. Almost all of the workers are men. This is because the entrepreneurs got rid of most of the women when they stopped doing street cleaning. The workers are all underpaid

There are also other groups that do litter picking and street sweeping in the townships. There was a Premier's Project for 18 months, which was part of the province's poverty alleviation programme. It employed people to do street sweeping and litter picking. Today there are groups of volunteers who do this kind of waste management work for free. They do it to keep their township clean. But they also do it in the hopes of getting a paid job. This case study looks at both the Premier's Project and volunteers. We show how these projects undermine women's long-term employment in the waste management sector.

About Sol Plaatje

From Kimberley to Sol Plaatje

Kimberley was one of the first white municipalities in the country to merge with the local black township. Here is some municipal boundary history:

1990 – The administrations of the Kimberley and Galeshewe councils merged.

1991 – The councils of Kimberley and Galeshewe merged.

2000 – Kimberley and Galeshewe were put together with Ritchie and large tracts of rural land to form the Sol Plaatje municipality (SPM).

In 2000 the Kimberley municipality merged with some small towns and rural areas and became the Sol Plaatje municipality. It is the largest urban area in the Northern Cape Province, and is also the province's capital. Many of us think of Kimberley as the place where diamonds were discovered in 1869. The town, which grew out of the mining industry's needs, was sometimes known as "the diamond capital of the world". But when diamond mining declined in the 1980s, the economy stopped growing. Today Sol Plaatje's economy is based on offering services to the surrounding areas. The largest employer is now community services provided by the government, followed by trade, transport and manufacturing.

The township residents have a very different life to those people who made their fortunes from owning and managing mines. You will find the townships' children barefoot in the icy winter with hunger gnawing in their tummies. In this Northern Cape town and surrounding townships, there is a 27% unemployment rate, and 70% of the households in Sol Plaatje have incomes of less than R800 a month.

Most township people find it difficult to pay for municipal services, like water, electricity and garbage removal. The municipality has an indigent policy to help very poor people pay for their services. Households that qualify under the policy receive a grant. The grant pays for their rates, sewerage, rubbish collection and rent, if they live in a council-owned house. But because so many people in Sol Plaatje are poor, the council also offers what it calls "service level choice". This means people will only be able to get the quality of service that they can afford to pay for. The council began this way of delivering services when it privatised waste management. This has made life even harder for Sol Plaatje's poor.

Privatising waste management services: townships only

Before Kimberley and Galeshewe's administrations merged, the Galeshewe council did rubbish collection, litter picking and street sweeping in the township. When they merged in 1990, Kimberley took over Galeshewe's waste management service. To do the job, the Kimberley municipality used its own staff and vehicles, as well as the staff from the Galeshewe municipality.

Public-private partnership 1:

A white-controlled black empowerment deal

Everyone agreed the municipality was delivering a good service to Galeshewe. But soon after the council merged in 1990, it began to explore different ways that waste management services could be delivered there. The council began to talk to a white-owned company called Billy Hattingh and Associates (BHA).

BHA had won tenders for waste management in many municipalities around the country. It said it was promoting black empowerment.

Sol Plaatje's local South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco) structures saw waste management work as an ideal way to promote black economic empowerment. Several councillors and managers in the municipality had strong links with Sanco. They pushed for the BHA deal, which went ahead in 1994.

In fact, one Sol Plaatje councillor represented Sanco on the committee that selected the entrepreneurs. Most of the entrepreneurs were either Sanco members or leaders.

In signing on with BHA, the council hoped that it would:

- decrease the council's waste management costs
- promote black economic empowerment
- create a stronger sense of ownership of service delivery in the black community
- teach people in the townships to be more responsible for their own waste management services
- make residents less dependant on council, and have lower expectations of it.

Sanco

Sanco is a township and mainly black membership-based organisation. It emerged in the 1980s through community struggles against the apartheid government. It is in an alliance with the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

Council gets rid of responsibility

The BHA deal was a three-way partnership. The partners were the municipality, BHA and local entrepreneurs. The council contracted BHA to make sure that waste management services were delivered in Galeshewe. BHA appointed seven local township people, six men and one woman, all living in the service delivery area, as the entrepreneurs to provide the services. The contracts were each for five years, effective from 1 December 1994. BHA and the entrepreneurs had different responsibilities. BHA had final responsibility for making sure that waste was collected and the streets were swept.

BHA's responsibilities

- Make sure that the entrepreneurs buy the right equipment for the job.
- Tell each entrepreneur in writing where to collect waste, and when to do it.
- Tell each entrepreneur in writing where to do litter picking and street sweeping, and when to do it.
- Make sure that entrepreneurs clean the entire area at least once a month.
- Monitor the entrepreneurs' performance.
- Make sure the entrepreneurs are developed and trained.
- Liaise with the entrepreneurs about providing the service.
- Take any of the council's complaints to the entrepreneurs, and resolve them.

Entrepreneurs' responsibilities

- Collect garbage from each house once a week.
- Remove illegal litter.
- Pick up litter.
- Sweep the streets.
- Employ four people to pick up litter and sweep throughout the area.
- Buy a tractor and modified trailer for collecting garbage.

The men entrepreneurs told us that they took it for granted that they had to employ women for litter picking.

The contract did not say anything about workers' rights and needs like protective clothing, equipment and facilities.



The contract did not say anything about how many women should be employed. But the men entrepreneurs told us that they took it for granted that they had to employ women for litter picking.

Lots of other important things were left out of the contract. For example, the contract did not say anything about what equipment the entrepreneurs must have for litter picking and street sweeping. It did not say anything about workers' rights and needs like protective clothing, equipment and facilities. It did not say that the entrepreneurs had to abide by labour laws and bargaining council agreements. In this way, the seeds were sown for an ineffective service and for exploitation of workers.

Paying the entrepreneurs

In the agreement with BHA, each month the council had to pay an accountancy firm R26,000 for each entrepreneur. Out of this money, the accounting firm paid BHA R2,400 for BHA's services to the entrepreneur, and paid the entrepreneur a salary of R1,600. The accounting firm paid the entrepreneurs' bills directly to the companies they owed money to. It did this after it received expense accounts from BHA. BHA had to make sure that the council gave the entrepreneurs proof of payment and copies of the expense accounts. This kind of arrangement seemed to leave the "empowerment" part out of black empowerment.

What if the entrepreneurs did not do the job properly?

The contract was very easy going on what would happen if the entrepreneurs did not do their job. They had 36 hours to get the service done properly – enough time for garbage to begin to rot, become smelly and cause health problems. The contract said that the council could take money off if there were delays in collecting garbage. But it said that the council could only end the contract if the entrepreneur didn't collect refuse for more than 120 days. It is not worth thinking about the state of rotting garbage and its impact on residents after this long!

First deal did not work out

There were many problems with the first contract. Some of them ended up in court cases in 1998. In one court case, the entrepreneurs said that BHA was not fulfilling its side of the deal. They said BHA did not provide support, training and adequate financial information, as was set out in the contract. They also said their funds were being mismanaged. But BHA said this was not true. It said that the entrepreneurs had created their own financial difficulties.

The entrepreneurs and BHA eventually reached an

agreement outside of the court. But the agreement did not deal with any of the issues that led to the court case in the first place. Instead, they said they would all to try to extend their contract with the council!

The council also brought court action against BHA for not making sure three entrepreneurs did their job properly. There was great frustration, anger and finger pointing all round. During these disputes, township residents had to put up with their garbage piling up and rotting.

The council eventually cancelled the BHA contract. It then contracted the entrepreneurs directly. Next we look at what happened with this arrangement.

During these disputes, township residents had to put up with their garbage piling up and rotting.

Public-private partnership 2: The problems remain

By March 2000, three of the seven original entrepreneurs had fallen out of the scheme. The council had contracted the remaining four entrepreneurs on a month-by-month basis to do the waste management work. In this public-private partnership the council decided to continue having black entrepreneurs delivering waste management services in the townships. This time, it was in a direct two-way partnership between the council and the entrepreneurs.

For financial reasons the council decided to have only six entrepreneurs. It took on the four remaining entrepreneurs from the BHA scheme, and two of the three entrepreneurs who had fallen out of the scheme. The council wrote new contracts for the entrepreneurs. But for some reason it has never signed them. Only two of the entrepreneurs got something in writing from the council because they needed it to get vehicle finance. Even so, the council said all of the entrepreneurs had to abide by the contracts.

Things get worse

The second contract, which was still in place at the time this book was written, was similar to the first contract. In the new contract the entrepreneurs have to do weekly collection and disposal of domestic waste, litter picking and street sweeping. The entrepreneurs are paid R40,077, including value-added tax, a month. The council pays the entrepreneurs directly.

The contract says that the fee for waste collection, disposal, street cleaning and litter picking will only be paid if the entrepreneur does the full job. The council is supposed to take off money if they do not do the job properly.

The rot sets in

The entrepreneurs have seven days, instead of the 36 hours they had in the BHA contract, to solve a service delivery problem. This is clearly in the entrepreneurs' and not the communities' interests. The council may keep back payments when the job is not done. The council can review the contract each year.

The council can cancel an entrepreneur's contract if the entrepreneur:

- does not deliver the service within 30 days
- creates a health risk
- breaks health and safety laws, or the municipal health and protection of natural resources by-laws (including illegally dumping refuse, for example)
- regularly offers a poor service.



Once again workers' rights are left out of the contract. It does not say that the entrepreneurs must abide by labour laws and bargaining council agreements. It also does not say they must provide workers with facilities, uniforms or protective clothing.

Contracts without clout

What is the point of the council signing contracts if it does not act on them? The council did not have a proper way to monitor and evaluate the entrepreneurs' service. According to the speaker of the council, who later became the mayor:

The cleansing department is supposed to be monitoring them, but what I can tell you is that they're not monitoring them. Instead the communities are monitoring them.

Why did council allow this to happen, seeing that its citizens are so badly affected when they receive a bad service? Uncollected rubbish attracts flies and spreads disease. It gets worse the longer it lies around. Was the council putting its commitment to this black economic empowerment deal over its citizens' needs? Yes, said one representative from provincial government:

Because of the municipality's stance on supporting PDIs [previously disadvantaged individuals] they didn't take a strong approach and were too lenient with the entrepreneurs, as they were hoping that the situation would improve. However, it didn't, and this created numerous problems related to the delivery of the service.

The council did not take much action against the entrepreneurs who did not do the job they were paid to do.

Impact of bad waste management: worse on women

Everyone who lived in the areas that the entrepreneurs serviced suffered from the poor service. In at least one of the areas in Galeshewe, people from the community were illegally dumping refuse next to a crèche. Throughout the townships, children treated illegal dumping sites as playgrounds. The manager of environmental health services for the Sol Plaatje municipality was worried about this. He said that children who played with uncollected garbage were likely to get sick from worms and from eating stuff from the sites, and to develop skin diseases. It is women who usually nurse the sick, so they were more affected by this than the men.

Women workers were also more likely bear the brunt of the extra work that the bad waste management service caused. Many more women (54%) than men (16%) were responsible for household chores.

The RDP workers (the name given to the entrepreneurs' workers) and municipal women workers spent their paid

Children who played with uncollected garbage were likely to get sick from worms and from eating stuff from the sites, and to develop skin diseases.

working day picking up litter and sweeping streets. Before going out to work they were more likely than men workers to pick up litter and sweep inside their yard and on the road outside their homes. They did this work for free. They were doing the work that the entrepreneurs refused to do, even though they were paid for it. So every day many township dwellers, mainly women, were subsidising the entrepreneurs' lack of delivery.

So every day many township dwellers, mainly women, were subsidising the entrepreneurs' lack of delivery.

Messy state of affairs

The contract stated very clearly that the entrepreneurs must do all the waste management work in the townships. But for various reasons they did not do it. The reasons included vehicle breakdowns, and the entrepreneurs simply deciding they would not do the work. Instead of taking action against the entrepreneurs, the municipality just stepped in and did the work itself. From 2000, the municipality took over refuse collection from an area that had been the responsibility of an entrepreneur whose contract had ended. When this research was being done, the municipality had started collecting waste in Roodepan. This was because the entrepreneur's vehicle had been broken for months. To do this work, the council hired casual workers, and used municipal vehicles, equipment and staff.

Entrepreneurs were supposed to clean the streets and open spaces. This included removing waste from illegal dumping sites. But most of the entrepreneurs said that they did not have enough money, or the right equipment to do it. So the municipality did it, using municipal vehicles and staff. But it did not take off money from the entrepreneurs' payment. As one of the municipal workers noted:

What's funny for me is if the municipality can do the job itself, why do they have to get other people to do their job?... Why do they have to get private contractors?... We now have to do their job and we get paid. And the contractor gets paid as well. So if you can look at it thoroughly it's two payments instead of one.

The entrepreneurs refused to deliver a street sweeping and litter picking service, even though their contract said they must. As one entrepreneur commented:

... if you look at... the last signed contract, they are still having a clause that we are expected to [clean open spaces, sweep and do litter picking]. I am refusing to do that. The council has a budget that they are not giving to me... they are giving it to the Premier's Project [a poverty alleviation project that included some waste management work]. Why don't they give me a budget, why should I go on and clean open spaces? What for when I don't even get a budget for doing that?

But the municipality's head of cleansing services said that the entrepreneurs were paid to do it. He said it was far too expensive to pay the entrepreneurs more than R40,000 a month just to collect refuse. He believed that the municipality could deliver a more cost-effective service.

Other things holding back delivery: resources

The entrepreneurs' vehicles broke down often. This meant they left garbage lying around for several days, and sometimes for much longer. Residents said that sometimes garbage was not collected for a whole month. Because of the health hazard this caused, they had to dump it illegally.

At one point, two of the entrepreneurs shared a truck for more than ten months. This meant the one entrepreneur's workers had to work into the night, seemingly without overtime pay.

The entrepreneurs agreed that their equipment was of a poor quality. They blamed Billy Hattingh of BHA for this. They said he arranged for them to buy the wrong kind of trailers to collect waste in. In 2002, the entrepreneurs were all still using the same vehicles they started with in 1994. Their contracts with BHA said that they must pay off their vehicles by the end of the first five-year contract. But by 2002, only two of the original seven entrepreneurs had done so. This was because they had mismanaged their finances. But they used their problems to get councillors' and municipal officials' sympathy. Many of them said they did not cancel the entrepreneurs' contracts because they felt sorry for them. But who were the real losers in the deal? We turn to this next.

Working for the municipality vs for the entrepreneurs

Women workers were in the minority both in the municipal waste management service, and in the entrepreneurs' workforces. Sol Plaatje's cleansing department did garbage collection, litter picking and street sweeping in the suburbs and business area. It had a permanent workforce of 80 men and 15 women. Many of these women began working as casuals in 1998, and became permanent in 2001. At the time of this research, the municipality employed four casual men workers to assist with collection in Roodepan. In addition, eleven men had been moved to the waste management department from the roads department because the work in that section had been privatised. The municipality only employed casuals every so often to help with street cleaning for special events, and for raking and tending grassy areas.

The entrepreneurs employed 56 men and five women. They also employed seven men casual workers, as replacements for workers on leave.

Most of the RDP and the municipal workers were African. The municipality had a greater proportion of coloured workers. About two-thirds of both workforces had completed grade eight or higher at school. But almost a quarter of the municipal workers had never been to school, compared to only 6% of the RDP workers who had never been to school.

More than 90% of the municipal workers were union members, but none of the RDP workers were. Samwu had failed when it tried to recruit them. A shopsteward explained this by saying:

When you recruit them, next time when you see their trucks they are not there... Sometimes they are dismissed. They do not come. I don't know why they do not come. They don't come. They just disappear.

Hard to join a union

The RDP workers explained that they had tried to form and join unions in the past, but the entrepreneurs threatened and intimidated them. One of the workers said: “The old woman [one of the entrepreneurs]... she told us that... they’ll chase us with dogs if ever we try to join a union.”

Even so, the RDP workers wanted to be unionised because they felt this would help them win their rights. They had, on their own, gone on a successful (unprotected) strike and taken other protest action against being paid late.

There was a far higher staff turnover amongst RDP workers than amongst municipal workers. The turnover, which made the RDP workers feel less secure, was because of dismissals and retrenchments. Workers were retrenched when an entrepreneur’s trucks were repossessed or not working for long periods. Workers also lost their jobs when the entrepreneurs decided to stop doing street sweeping, litter picking and cleaning open spaces.

Women’s work, men’s work

We have shown that far more men than women get jobs in waste management in Sol Plaatje. This is because of the very strong gender division of labour in this sector. In the municipality all of the women, except one who was the cleaner at the depot, were employed in the street cleaning section. Women did not get loading jobs because of the excuse that only men have the strength and skill for this. Said one man worker:

... to pick up a dustbin, put it on your shoulders and throw it into the truck is not child’s play. And that is why, whether we like it or not, some of the jobs are really meant for men and there is no woman who, for example, can jump onto a truck while it’s driving. Men are doing it because they are very fast.

One of the men workers said loaders’ skills are actually natural male talents, which women simply do not have:

The problem with women is that men are able to catch a car when it’s in motion, but a woman does not have such tricks.

These men’s gender stereotypes are strong. But they are not really based on reality. Every day women carry heavy loads of shopping, fuel and containers of water on their heads. This is not child’s play either.

One of women councillors challenged gender stereotypes about women’s and men’s different skills. She said:

They say that women can’t do hard work. But it’s funny. When you look at the projects, paving and what have you, women do it... So, when they say women can’t lift the dustbins because they are too heavy, I think it’s actually that it has always been done by men.

**“The old woman
one of the
entrepreneurs!...
she told us that...
they’ll chase us
with dogs if ever we
try to join a union.”**

Photographs on the following page show: At the top a compactor used by the municipality and, at the bottom an outdated trailer used by the RDP.



Women were much more likely to be hired by the municipality than by entrepreneurs. At the time we did our research almost no women were employed by the entrepreneurs.

With the BHA contract, each of the men entrepreneurs made sure that women made up about 40% of their workforce. As we noted earlier, they did this because they thought they had to. Their gender stereotypes were so strong that they thought when the contract said that they had to hire four workers for street cleaning, this meant that they had to hire four women. There was only one woman entrepreneur. To assert her authority and prove that she could manage a team of men, she only hired men.

When the entrepreneurs still did street sweeping and litter picking, they only hired women for it. The women lost their jobs when the entrepreneurs stopped doing it.

The entrepreneurs hired men to load bins onto the trucks because they felt men were more physically suited to the job. The few women still employed by the entrepreneurs cleaned illegal dumping sites and open spaces. The entrepreneurs said if the council gave them more funds they would do street sweeping, litter picking, and clean open spaces and illegal dumping sites. They said they would hire women for this work.

Saving costs on labour – at whose expense?

Waste management work requires lots of workers. So, in trying to save money, the entrepreneurs retrenched workers and stopped doing some of the work. They were clearly breaking their contracts by doing this. This left the RDP workers still employed with an impossible workload. The women who worked clearing up illegal dumping felt bad about it:

... I do not feel good because the place is not clean, and it will never be clean because we are very few. Yet there are many people who are unemployed. The unemployment rate is highest here. That is why the crime is so high. So I am saying we are very few and we need people.

There was also a serious labour shortage in the municipality. The municipality did not replace workers who died, retired or were dismissed. So the number of workers in the waste management department had decreased by 40% in three years between 2000 and 2003.

As the staff numbers dropped, men were transferred to garbage collection. This was because the municipality put collection services provided to individual households above street cleaning. Street cleaning is a public service provided to everyone. It is paid for out of the council's general rates account. The municipality thought that people would be more upset if their rubbish was not collected, than if the streets were not swept. They said that because individual households paid a tariff for collection services, the municipality needed to make sure that they got what they paid for. So, if the collection section was short-staffed, men from the all-male municipal cleansing staff were redeployed there to help. But the all-women street cleaning section was not so lucky. Workers who left were never replaced. Casuals were only hired to help during special events, like during the cricket world cup.

Many of the men (68%) employed by the municipality said they thought they worked with the right number of people on their truck or in their team. However, it is not surprising that all except two of the women workers thought there were too few people in their team.

“...I do not feel good because the place is not clean, and it will never be clean because we are very few. Yet there are many people who are unemployed...”

Working alone: not as safe as before

The shortage of staff in the municipal street cleaning section affected the way work was organised. It meant a poorer service was delivered. Instead of working in pairs as before, women now worked alone. It made them feel less safe. Before they regularly worked in the same area, and knew its danger zones. Because of the labour shortage, workers were often moved to different areas where they were not known. People there were less likely to help them when they needed it.

Wages, benefits and conditions of employment

Wages: rather work for the municipality

The average take-home pay for both men and women permanent municipal waste management workers was R1,754 a month. Compare this to the R826 for the women RDP workers and R857 for the men. The men who worked for the entrepreneurs earned far below the minimum wage set by the Road Freight Bargaining Council. Those who worked five days a week should have earned at least R1,234 each month. The municipality paid its casuals R65 a day. This would be around R1,430 a month if they worked every working day. The entrepreneurs paid casuals R732 a month.

The RDP workers said that their jobs were harder than municipal workers' jobs but they earned less:

We are doing the same job. But the thing is that they are using the compactors, and they have everything. We do the toughest job. We have to lift bins, but they are using the compactors.

The entrepreneur admitted that they were not paying a living wage. They blamed the council for this. They said the council was paying them too little. The entrepreneurs said it was okay to pay the women lower wages than the men because the women "don't sweat".



The average take-home pay for both men and women permanent municipal waste management workers was R1,754 a month. Compare this to the R826 for the women RDP workers and R857 for the men.

Stretching very little very far

Most of the men and women municipal and RDP workers were the main breadwinners in their households. On average, the municipal workers and the men RDP workers supported between four and five dependants. On average, the women RDP workers supported three dependants. Most of these dependants lived with them in Galeshewe and Roodepan.

It was much harder for the RDP workers than the municipal workers to pay for their municipal services and to avoid electricity and water cut-offs. This was because they earned much less than the municipal workers.

Bearing the brunt of privatisation: benefits

Permanent municipal waste management workers had the following:

- sick leave
- maternity leave (for women who needed it)
- family responsibility leave
- annual leave
- compassionate leave
- annual bonus
- registration with the unemployment insurance fund (UIF)
- membership of a provident fund.

Two-thirds of the municipal workers received medical aid, just over half had housing loans, and just over half had received study leave. They all received regular payslips.

By contrast, of the RDP workers:

- only half received sick leave
- 11% received family responsibility leave
- 62% received annual leave
- half received an annual bonus
- fewer than 23% were members of a pension or provident fund
- only one-third said they were registered with the UIF.

We spoke to a number of workers who had been dismissed or laid off for long periods. None of them had received UIF payouts. Two of the women workers reported that they thought they would be able to have maternity leave. None of the RDP workers we spoke to had been given payslips.

Protective clothing for privatised workers – forget it

The municipality had cut down on how much and what kind of protective clothing and equipment it gave its workers. But its workers still received far more than the RDP workers did.

Permanent municipal waste management workers:

- Almost all received overalls; and almost two-thirds received more than one pair of overalls.
- Almost all received at least one raincoat, a hat and pair of boots.
- One-fifth were given both shoes and boots.
- Although 17% did not receive shirts, the rest received at least one shirt, and more than half received two or more shirts.
- Only 5% of the workers did not receive gloves. This was probably because they were drivers or worked in the depot. More than half of the municipal waste workers received two or more pairs of gloves each year.

RDP workers:

- Received almost no protective clothing and equipment.
- Only 26% received overalls and 8% received dust jackets.
- Only one worker reported receiving shirts, hats, boots and socks.

“We work with our own clothes. We do not even get safety boots. We get handgloves. We do not get a cap to protect ourselves from the sun.”

- Almost half of the workers said they received masks.
- One-third of the RDP workers reported that they did not even receive gloves.

One of the entrepreneurs said that at first he bought uniforms for the workers “... but they are so careless these guys. They are losing them. Due to the high payment I am making to the bank I can’t replace them.”

On their very low wages, the RDP workers were forced to subsidise their employers by doing very tough and dirty work in their own clothes. They said: “We work with our own clothes. We do not even get safety boots. We get handgloves. We do not get a cap to protect ourselves from the sun.”

The municipal workers felt bad for the RDP workers. They said:

With these private contractors they [workers] do not get benefits that they are supposed to get... the poor guy works with his shoes and they get finished... And then they are also supposed to work with their own clothes. So what’s that? You have to work with your own clothes and then you get little money. Many of us are not prepared to work under such conditions.



Facilities: especially bad for women and RDP workers

Men municipal workers had better toilet and washing facilities than the women did. The municipal depot provided toilets and hot showers for the men workers. Women workers could use the toilets at the depot. But they did not have showers. So they used a bucket to wash, or waited to wash when they got home, where they would have to pay for the water themselves. All municipal workers received toilet paper, and soap to wash themselves and their uniforms.

The entrepreneurs did not have a depot. RDP workers reported to the entrepreneurs’ houses each morning. Some said that the entrepreneurs did not even let them use their toilets. Every day they had problems getting access to toilet facilities. As one municipal worker said:

When you go to the shops they do not want to give us toilets. And our public toilets are very far. You have to walk a long distance before you can get a toilet.

Workers in the townships asked the residents if they could use their toilets. Many, especially those with toilets in their houses, refused. So workers were often forced to relieve themselves in parks and public places. Both men and women workers suffered this indignity. But for women it was worse because they are more vulnerable than men when going to the toilet. It was even more of a problem and a health risk for women workers when they were menstruating.



Municipal workers get better protective clothing

Working hours

The municipal workers and the RDP worked very different hours. Almost all of the municipal workers worked five or six days a week. Sometimes they worked overtime on Sundays. The entrepreneurs were supposed to work five days a week too. But a quarter of the RDP workers said they worked four days a week, and 11% said that they worked only three days a week.

This was because they had stopped doing the street cleaning, litter picking and illegal dumping services. The entrepreneurs had shortened their working week and still got the same amount of money! Although many of the RDP workers worked less than five days a week, they often ended up working unpaid overtime because of vehicle breakdowns and delays with repairs. Men municipal workers also sometimes knocked off late because they were not able to finish all of their work. But this happened more often with RDP workers.

Men workers were more likely to knock off later than the women were. Only one-quarter of the women municipal workers said that they knocked off late. The women who worked for the entrepreneurs never knocked off late. This difference between women and men was because of the type of work that they were doing. Men worked in refuse collection, which is a job that must be completed in certain areas each day. Women, however, were sweeping, cleaning and litter picking in public spaces. Because of staff shortages their work was never really finished.

Safe environment: different views

Men and women felt differently about their safety at work. Two-thirds of municipal men workers thought the safety of their working environment was good. But half of the women municipal workers were unhappy with it. This was because of the different kinds of work that they were doing. Men worked in teams and travelled with a truck, while women often worked alone in the streets.

Quality of service: down in the dumps in the townships

Everyone, even Billy Hattingh (although he blamed the entrepreneurs), admitted that since the public-private partnership started the quality of waste management service delivery had gone down in the townships. Members of the community had complained often and bitterly. The speaker of the council, who not long after being interviewed became mayor, spoke openly about this, saying:

In fact most of our communities do not want these entrepreneurs... 98% of the communities do not want these entrepreneurs because they are not doing what they are supposed to do. Yes, they [members of the community] have in fact screamed through our ward committees that we should rather terminate the contract of these people. And we have been trying to convince them so that they desist, because they [the entrepreneurs] employ so many people.

However, as we've mentioned earlier, entrepreneurs had cut down on their workforces.

The speaker of the council noted that only privatising in the townships was unfair, and could cause problems within the municipality.

Many workers, shopstewards, and even some council representatives, felt strongly that the RDP contract kept apartheid-type inequalities going.

Sweeping the yard – why a woman’s job?

More than half of the women workers in the research said they were the main one responsible for sweeping their yards. More than one-quarter said that either an adult woman pensioner or another adult woman was responsible for this duty. But only 30% of the men workers were the main person responsible for sweeping their yard. 55% of the men said that either an adult woman pensioner or other adult women swept the yard on a regular basis. Men were strongly discouraged from sweeping. One man worker who admitted during an interview that he swept every day was laughed at. Those men who laughed at him said that they laughed “because it’s a woman’s job to sweep the yard”.

So black working-class residents of the impoverished Galeshewe township continued to receive a bad service from a failed privatisation deal. Workers felt that people in the township accepted the poor service because they felt they had no choice, even in the new democracy. They thought that white and wealthy citizens would not stand for this level of service.

Most of the municipal workers, and almost all of the RDP workers thought that workers in the suburbs had better working conditions than the RDP workers in the townships. They also thought that those working in the suburbs had better equipment.

Not surprisingly, a huge majority of all the workers said they would prefer to work for the municipality. Most thought that council would be more likely, as an employer, to improve the situation of women workers.

Almost all of the municipal workers, and 66% of RDP workers, said they would rather have the municipality deliver services where they live.

The Premier’s Project – helping the municipality and the entrepreneurs

The Northern Cape provincial government was involved in a number of projects that benefited the municipality and the entrepreneurs. It paid for casual workers to clean up different areas of the municipality a number of times. But the most important project was one that the province’s premier started.

In 2000, the premier pledged R5.2-million for poverty alleviation and infrastructure development in Galeshewe. This was called the Premier’s Project. The announcement about it was made just before the local government elections, and was part of the ANC’s campaign strategy. As the speaker of the council, who co-ordinated the project, noted:

You must bear in mind that we are politicians.

When we go out there, and it’s election time, and there is an outcry, and you see really people are desperate, you will make commitments immediately. Basically that is what happened.

Most of the money was for upgrading roads and building storm-water drains in the township. In one part of Galeshewe (Ward 15), R45,000 was set aside for street sweeping. But even in the other two wards (19 and 5) when there was not paving work to do, the workers did street cleaning.

The project was meant to last for seven months. But it was extended a few times and eventually stopped after 18 months. In the end, it cost the provincial government more than R13-million. The provincial government worked on the project with the Sol Plaatje municipality. There were

councillors, representatives from relevant ward committees, technical staff from council, and staff from the provincial department of transport on the project's steering committee.

RDP officers worked with ward councillors to recruit workers for the project. ANC branches were also very involved in this. The first jobs went to adults from households with only unemployed living in them.

The Premier's Project employed 681 people. 60% of these were women, but most of the team leaders were men.

Better than nothing?

The workers who were recruited each received two tops and trousers and gloves. They did not have rain gear, but they did not work when it rained. Team leaders earned R40 a day, key team leaders earned R65 a day, and ordinary workers received R31 a day. The workers did not belong to a union. They were afraid that they would lose their jobs if they tried to join one. They did try to negotiate for higher wages but were unsuccessful. Even though they earned very little, the workers did at least receive some money for the short time that they worked on the project. They were able to buy necessities and pay for school fees during that time. But when the project ended, the workers struggled to make ends meet. They no longer had an income, and many had got into debts that they could not pay off. At the time of this research, many told us that the companies were trying to repossess their goods.

Some of the entrepreneurs benefited from the free labour. This was because the Premier's Project workers worked in areas where some of the entrepreneurs were supposed to do street sweeping. The municipality benefited in other ways and in other parts of the municipality. It used the workers from the Premier's Project as its free casual labour reserve.

For example, workers were often sent to help in cleaning taxi ranks and other areas in the municipality. In fact, 450 workers were deployed for four months to help clean other parts of Sol Plaatje. One member of council told us that they were "like a group of people who were on standby".

Workers from the Premier's Project knew that they were doing municipal workers' work. As one worker noted: "The Premier's Project was helping the council too much. There were big spaces and we had to skoffel them with only those rakes. It was hard."

Another worker argued: "It was our aim to be employed by the municipality... because we were doing their jobs. It is their job to clean the streets."

The municipal workers realised the danger of this. As one of the Samwu shopstewards said: "It was a threat to us. Because if we were on strike they took them to do our work."

The entrepreneurs felt that the Premier's Project made a big contribution to keeping Galeshewe clean. But they said the money should have been given to them so that they could have hired extra workers. This was in line with their refusal to do street sweeping and litter picking unless the municipality gave them more money.

The municipality's head of cleansing services also said he wished the province had given the municipality the funds to hire workers to do street cleaning in Galeshewe. He said that he could have used the funds more effectively, and made sure there was stricter labour control.

Volunteers: subsidising those responsible

After two years of volunteering, many of the volunteers had lost hope that they would get a job.

There were many volunteer groups doing street cleaning work in Galeshewe. The volunteers felt that it was unfair that when the former white suburbs were dirty, the council sent in workers to clean them up. But as black township residents they were expected to work for free to keep their areas clean. There were some volunteer groups that sprung up on their own, and the municipality had started others. The speaker of the council had instructed councillors to become involved in co-ordinating these activities. At the time of the interviews, the two largest volunteer campaigns were in Galeshewe's wards 13 and 20. About 85 people volunteered in these two wards, 70% of whom were women. All of the volunteers that we spoke to from these wards were ANC members.

Some of the workers from the Premier's Project also continued to volunteer in their areas after the project was over.

The organisation Keep Kimberley Clean organised volunteers in all parts of the municipality, including the suburbs, but, their campaigns only lasted for a few days at a time. The only long-term volunteering happened in the townships.

The volunteers in Galeshewe's wards 13 and 20 worked six hours a day, five days a week. They did not receive any money, food or uniforms. As one volunteer noted:

We only get promises that we will get jobs... That is why we are waking up in the morning, and why we are leaving our children at home.

However, after two years of volunteering, many of the volunteers had lost hope that they would get a job.

The speaker of the council noted that women were more likely than men to volunteer. He said this was because of women's responsibility for caring for the sick.

[Women] have got children who are playing with this rubble, so they have a responsibility because at the end of the day they suffer as parents.

They've got to run up and down to the clinics and to the hospitals. So men do not really care, put it that way.

Men volunteers said that other men looked down on them for wasting their time. But they said they volunteered "in order to market themselves". Because they were so desperate to get a job, they were willing to do "women's work". The volunteers, however, did not realise that by working for free they were helping the municipality keep its costs down. It was not forced to create more paid jobs. The volunteers were also helping the entrepreneurs get away with not doing the work they were paid to do. So by volunteering, they were actually preventing possible paid jobs from being created. And because it was street sweeping and litter picking work, these would have increased the only jobs available to women.



The volunteers, however, did not realise that by working for free they were helping the municipality keep its costs down. It was not forced to create more paid jobs.

How to get out of the mess?

Most people we interviewed, including some entrepreneurs, agreed that the RDP waste management public-private partnership had failed, and that it could not carry on. But people disagreed on how the waste management work should be done. One grouping within the council strongly argued for a new public-private partnership for the entire waste management system. They wanted to involve the entrepreneurs and a large black empowerment waste management company with links to a multinational company. In fact, many people within the council even thought a contract had already been granted. Not everybody agreed with this idea. Some people did not support the proposed company. Others said that the procedure for companies to tender for the work must be followed properly. And yet others had their own proposals. One of these proposals was that councillors be responsible for street cleaning contracts in their wards. In this proposal they would be responsible for hiring casual workers to do the work.

Sol Plaatje's privatisation deal was a big failure. It was clear that the municipality could do the waste management work, and was in fact collecting garbage in two areas previously serviced by entrepreneurs. But very few people, other than Samwu shopstewards, said that the municipality should take it back. There was no agreement on what path to follow when this book was being written. And so while the debate raged on, RDP workers and township residents, and women in particular, were still bearing the brunt of a bad waste management service. ○

Privatising waste management in Johannesburg



Johannesburg at a glance

For many years the councils that now make up Johannesburg had contracts with private companies (called third party contractors) to deliver some of their waste management services. But in 2001 Johannesburg took a much bigger step on the privatisation path. It turned its entire waste management department into a private company, called Pikitup. Pikitup has 11 waste management depots, five landfill sites and one incinerator. Altogether it employs 3,513 people. Pikitup continues to use many different contractors to provide services. It has partly done this to promote black economic empowerment amongst small businesses. Pikitup and the third party contractors are not the only organisations providing waste management services in Johannesburg. In the townships, long-term volunteer groups and workers employed by poverty alleviation projects help to clean the streets. In the formerly white suburbs and central business district workers employed by city improvement districts do the same job. In this case study, we look at what privatisation has meant for waste management workers, and for working-class and wealthy communities in Johannesburg.

Summary of findings

The Johannesburg council owns Pikitup. Pikitup provides most waste management services for council. It also contracts many private companies to provide the rest. Private companies are mainly concerned with making money. Our research found that to make more profit, private companies cut down on workers' wages, benefits, facilities, and protective clothing and equipment. Workers were badly affected by privatisation. We found that women in these companies were generally worse off than the men. We also found that since Pikitup became a private company it also made changes to cut its costs. This also affected workers badly. For example, Pikitup workers receive fewer uniforms than they did when they worked for council. Because Pikitup cut down on staff, fewer workers were expected to do the same job previously done by more workers.

Our research showed that the increased privatisation of waste management services in Johannesburg has caused more problems for waste management workers and for the working-class communities where they live. We found that women suffered the most from privatisation, both at work and at home. We also found that:

- Pikitup workers had a difficult life. But their wages and working conditions were much better than third party contractors' workers.
- Women workers at Pikitup and at the third party contractors were, in most cases, worse off than the men working for both employers.
- Women and men were hired for different kinds of jobs. Women were stuck in street cleaning. Third party contractors paid lower wages for street cleaning than for other kinds of waste management work, like collecting garbage.
- Pikitup cut down on its street cleaning staff. Women workers were most affected by this, and so were women in the townships.
- Volunteer programmes, poverty alleviation projects, and city improvement districts all provided street cleaning services to help make up for the bad job done by Pikitup and third party contractors.
- Long-term volunteer and poverty alleviation projects were only happening in the townships. They did not help create permanent jobs for the unemployed. These projects did the same kind of work that Pikitup and the third party contractors hired women to do. Overall women lost out most because Pikitup and the third party contractors could get away with having fewer street cleaning staff. And fewer 'women's' jobs were created.
- In the former white areas businesses also hired workers to clean the streets. These workers earned far better wages than workers employed by poverty alleviation projects in the townships. Almost all of these workers were men. By employing these men to do work that should have been done by Pikitup, the improvement districts helped Pikitup to reduce the number of workers that it employed in street cleaning, the only section where women were employed.

About Johannesburg

Johannesburg is also known as iGoli, the city of gold. Rich gold deposits were discovered in 1886. People flocked there to seek their fortune. Johannesburg is now the commercial capital of South Africa. It has both super-rich and very poor areas. Almost three million people live in Johannesburg. Just under half of all households have no regular income, and 29% of the population is unemployed. Johannesburg is a young city, with most of its people between 13 and 39 years old. Today's large Johannesburg council was formed when 13 local councils joined together.

iGoli 2002

In 1999, the Johannesburg council adopted the iGoli 2002 plan to transform and restructure the city. As part of the plan, the city sold some of its assets, like Metro Gas. Other departments were turned into utilities, agencies or corporatised entities (UACs). The UACs are all private companies. The main difference between the different types of UACs is the amount of profit that the city council thinks they can make. The city council turned the departments it thought could make a profit and support themselves financially into utilities. These include Pikitup, Johannesburg Water, and City Power. Departments that provided public goods that consumers cannot be directly charged for, and that cannot make any money on their own, were turned into agencies. Agencies were created for roads and storm water, parks and cemeteries. The zoo, the Civic Theatre, Metrobus, and the fresh produce market can all make some money on their own, but will probably always need to get some financial support from council too. This is why when the council turned them into private and section 21 companies it called them corporatised entities. Trade unions and social movements have challenged this privatisation of the city's services. Other municipalities have, however, used iGoli 2002 as a model for their own restructuring and privatisation.

How we did the research

We did research in five of Pikitup's 11 depots. We interviewed Pikitup and third party contractor workers at these depots. We also interviewed councillors, trade union representatives, and company managers. We chose depots that provided services to different kinds of areas. We included those that serviced rich and poor, and white and black areas. You will find more detail about these five depots in the table on page 65.

About the five depots:

- All of them collected rubbish from homes. Pikitup calls this round collected refuse, or RCR.
- All of them provided some kind of street cleaning service. In some depots, street cleaning included street sweeping, litter picking and cleaning of illegal dumping sites. In other depots only some of these street cleaning services were provided.
- Some depots delivered a mix of extra services. These other services included:
 - a garden refuse dumping site
 - collecting rotting food, called wet waste, from restaurants
 - collecting big garbage containers from businesses.
- The depots contracted different kinds of third party contractors to provide different kinds of services.

Pikitup privatises to contractors

Pikitup uses private third party contractors a lot to get Johannesburg's waste management service done. It has three main types of contracts with the third party contractors. These are:

- Truck and driver schemes. In these schemes, a company provides the depot with a vehicle, a driver, and sometimes an operator who operates the machines that are part of the trucks.
- Contracts with labour brokers. The labour brokers provide the depots with workers, either on a daily or monthly basis.
- Contracts for street cleaning, or street cleaning and collection services in particular areas of the city.

At the time of the research, the five depots had 35 contracts with 20 different companies. Some companies had a contract with only one depot. Others had contracts at more depots. Multiwaste, for example, had contracts at all the five depots.

Pikitup spent a lot of money on the third party contracts. The depots that we studied spent between 14% and 45% of their annual budget on third party contractors. In these five depots, Pikitup did street cleaning and collection services in all of the former white and richer areas. It only subcontracted this work in the inner city and the townships of Alexandra and Orange Farm.



Checking on the third party contractors' work

Many of the third party contracts with Pikitup had expired. But Pikitup continued to work with the contractors on a month-by-month basis. Pikitup did a good job of checking on some of the contractors' work. It made sure that the labour brokers, and the truck and driver scheme contractors did their jobs. Pikitup paid a contractor less if he or she did not get the work done properly. But depots did not monitor the cleaning and collection contractors' contracts in the townships very well. Managers from the Orange Farm and Alexandra depots said they did not even have copies of the contracts. The contracts had expired anyway, so Pikitup worked with them on a month-by-month basis. The managers said they had been told that the contractors had a long time to sort out problems. Therefore Pikitup could not deduct money when the contractors did not do their job properly.



Don't worry about the workers

Pikitup's contracts with the third party contractors did not say anything about workers' rights. The contracts did not say that contractors must abide by labour laws or with bargaining

council agreements. The companies do have to abide by these laws and agreements. But Pikitup did not make sure that they did. Pikitup managers told us they were only worried about making sure the job got done. We found that many of the third party contractor workers were denied their basic legal rights. But Pikitup would not take any responsibility for this.

Worry about black economic empowerment

The contract between the Johannesburg council and Pikitup said that Pikitup had to promote black economic empowerment (BEE) and small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs). It also had to promote the empowerment of people with disabilities. Once Pikitup signed a contract with a black-owned company, it felt it had to continue with that company even if it delivered a bad service or treated its workers badly. It also felt it had to stick with the black-owned company even if a white-owned company offered to do the work for less. Pikitup managers were scared that action would be taken if they stopped a contract. There had been incidents when unsuccessful private companies had burned trucks and tried to stop new contractors from working.

There had been incidents when unsuccessful private companies had burned trucks and tried to stop new contractors from working.

Jo'burg's waste management workforce

Altogether, including third party contractors' workers, there were 2,756 workers in the five depots we researched. Over a quarter of these waste management workers were employed by companies other than Pikitup. Pikitup employed 1,971 non-administration workers from the level of driver supervisor and below. In the table that comes next, you will see the areas that each depot serviced and how many workers there were at each depot. It also shows the percent of workers hired by third party contractors.

Depot	Total number of workers at depot	% of workers employed by third party contractors
Zondi: services large parts of the African township Soweto	640	13%
Selby: services the inner city and some of Johannesburg's southern and eastern suburbs	941	30.2%
Marlboro: services formerly white suburb of Sandton, and the impoverished African township of Alexandra	488	50%
Norwood: services former whites-only suburbs like Houghton and Rosebank	276	14.1%
Avalon: services the mainly Indian area of Lenasia, the mainly coloured area of Eldorado Park, the mainly African area of Orange Farm, and many African squatter camps and informal settlements	411	32.8%
Total	2,756	28.5%

The depots with a greater percentage of their workforce employed by third party contractors were those that had contracts to do labour-intensive work. This kind of work is street cleaning and collection. Overall, 64% of all third party contractors' workers in the five depots were employed in street cleaning, or street cleaning and collection contracts in Avalon, Selby and Malboro.

Almost all of the waste management workers were African, and it has always been like this. We found that third party contractor workers had higher average levels of education than Pikitup. Most (97%) of Pikitup workers said they were union members. But only 8% of the contractors' workers were.

Gender division of labour: who does what?

In Johannesburg men have traditionally dominated waste management work. The municipality only began to employ women in the late 1970s and early 1980s. All of these women were employed to do street cleaning. This was the beginning of the gender division of labour of men and women in certain jobs that we see today. When we did our research 93% of the women employed by Pikitup and 100% of the women employed by the third party contractors worked in street cleaning.

Women were given jobs in street cleaning because this work is similar to the work they did at home. As one woman worker said:

They say they're hiring the ladies [for street cleaning] because the ladies can clean the house, they can look after the kids, do the washing, cleaning and everything. Now the men, they didn't sweep properly, it was just tsho, tsho, tsho, tsho.

Only 1% of women workers employed by Pikitup worked in the section that does garbage collection. People told us that men, not women, go together with machinery and technology. Pikitup's five depots did not employ even one woman operator, loader, or driver of a collection vehicle. Women workers said this was unfair:

A compactor is operated by someone special and the driver is just sitting. Woman can also do that but it's just that they do not want us to.

Almost all men and women workers and managers said that women should not work as loaders. They said this was because women were not fast or strong enough.

When it suited the company, women workers did sometimes work as loaders, but only when men were not there to do the job.

Many of the women interviewed who had worked as loaders felt that the job was too heavy for them. However others who had done it said otherwise: "No it's not heavy. It's

People told us that men, not women, go together with machinery and technology.



New truck with mechanised lift

right. I liked it, and I wanted to leave this job and work in loading, but they said ‘no it’s a men’s job’.”

Collection work had become lighter and easier for Pikitup workers in four of the five depots that we studied. This is because there were new kinds of rubbish bins and trucks. The trucks have a mechanical lift to pick up garbage bins. However, at the time of the research, the depots still had not hired women as loaders. This was unfortunate, as women who had worked as loaders said they felt safer in the team work of loading than in sweeping the streets on their own.

Making up the workforce: women and men

Women made up 38% of the workers in the five depots. Pikitup had a slightly higher percentage of women in its workforce than the third party contractors did. Pikitup was more likely to hire women than the contractors were. This was because some of the contractors only provided services that were seen as men’s jobs, like truck and driver services. No third party contractors had hired women as drivers or operators.

The depots used labour brokers almost only when they needed to replace loaders. Workers employed by the brokers said that it was Pikitup’s gender division of labour that made the brokers decide to send men for certain jobs. They said: “When TX [a labour broker] hired us under Pikitup, Pikitup told TX that it wants men, it never said it wants women.”

The labour brokers had hired only five women workers. Four of them were hired to clean streets, and the other worked in the Pikitup depot. All of the other women employed by third party contractors were employed by companies which had street cleaning and collection contracts.

All of the third party contractors’ women workers worked either in the inner city, or in townships and informal settlements. Not a single woman employed by a third party contractor worked in a formerly white, wealthy area where workers in our survey thought working conditions were better.

Not a single woman employed by a third party contractor worked in a formerly white, wealthy area where workers in our survey thought working conditions were better.

Public to private: changes in hiring casuals

The Johannesburg waste management department used to employ casual workers from among the many work-seekers who queued outside the gates every day. There were two types of casual workers. There were “permanent casuals” who worked for Pikitup five days a week for many years. And there were “casual casuals”. Depots hired casual casuals to work for a day or so to make up for permanent workers who were off. They would also hire casuals to help during the city’s special events.

When the council privatised, all of the permanent casuals were sent to Pikitup and became permanent staff. When this happened, Pikitup said it did not have enough money right away to pay the same salaries and benefits. It said it would slowly get them equal over three years. More women than men were these former non-permanents (FNPs), as they were called. They bore more of the brunt of earning lower wages, and having fewer benefits over the three-year phase-in period.

Pikitup tried to use fewer casuals. It did this by moving workers to what it said were the most important areas when workers were absent. But it still hired some workers in addition to its permanent workforce. The big change from how the municipality did things was that instead of hiring workers from the gate, Pikitup used labour brokers to

Some depots lost up to half of their supervisors.

get extra workers when it needed them. Pikitup managers said this was easier for them. It meant they did not have to handle recruitment or payment. It also saved Pikitup from having casual workers trying to claim permanent jobs.

Shrinking the Pikitup workforce, increasing workers' load

In the mid 1990s, the Johannesburg municipality stopped hiring new workers. Pikitup did the same. After Pikitup was formed it did not replace workers who left, were dismissed, or passed away. This resulted in a serious shortage of workers. There was also a shortage of supervisors. During the days of the municipality there had been supervisors for every area serviced by the depot. But Pikitup decided that instead of putting supervisors in different areas there should be supervisors for different functions, like street cleaning, or RCR. Because of this, some depots lost up to half of their supervisors.

Workers said they felt unsafe with fewer supervisors because supervisors check that they were okay when working in the streets. Women workers felt especially unsafe. They explained why:

When you were sweeping the streets you knew that there would be supervisors coming to check on you, to see whether you are sick or not. If you fell in the street, you knew that the supervisor would come and check you, and that he would call an ambulance for you... Right now there are few supervisors.

There was also a big shortage of general workers at the depots. Workers said that managers still expected them, as a smaller workforce, to get the same amount of work done as before. This put huge pressure on them. Even workers at the depot that had the lowest percentage (12%) staff shortage were badly affected. They said:

There are those who go on early pension because of health problems, they do not employ. There are those who they dismiss, they do not employ. At the end they want the job finished.

Workers found it hard to take sick leave, and when sick at work, they were no longer transferred to lighter work. As a worker said: "...When a worker says 'I am sick', they say 'you are not sick, go and work'... Pikitup is not treating us fairly."

The street cleaning sections in all depots suffered the most from the staff cuts. Men were taken from street cleaning to work permanently in collection. When workers were absent from collection, most depots would take men workers from the street cleaning to help out in collection for the day. Men workers were affected by being moved from one section to another with little or any notice. Women workers, who were



almost only hired to do street cleaning, were expected to get the same job done with fewer workers. The depots regularly hired casuals to help with loading work, but they only hired casuals to help with street cleaning on very special occasions.

Management put collection first because they said that they made more profit out of it than street sweeping. Johannesburg residents, institutions like schools and churches, and private businesses all pay a monthly tariff for waste collection. The city collects this money and gives it to Pikitup to pay for collection services and the running of the landfills. But the council pays Pikitup for activities like street cleaning and maintaining garden sites out of its general rates account. The council wants to use this money for other things. So, it puts huge pressure on Pikitup to reduce the amount of money that it needs from the council for these non income-generating activities. One way of doing this is by making street cleaning and other non income generating activities absorb the staff shortage. As one manager from Selby explained:

If we are short of staff we shift staff to RCR [domestic collection] as it is the only income generating area. Street sweeping is a social service, and people don't pay for it.

Some Pikitup depot management believed head office was reducing the number of workers in street cleaning on purpose to help bring about more privatisation. One depot manager said:

They are allowing attrition [decrease in the number of workers] in that function to take place. When we have three to four street cleaners left they will outsource.

Another depot manager believed that when the street cleaning workforce was small enough, Pikitup would get machines to do the sweeping.

Changing how the work is done at Pikitup

To make up for the staff shortages in street cleaning, Pikitup changed how this work was done. Each worker was forced to do the work of many. One worker said:

... The work is killing us here. There is nothing that makes us happy. They came and promised us that we would be better off, we would get everything and we would never complain about anything. It is bad now with Pikitup, we are thinking of the municipality we used to work for.

Not only was the workforce getting smaller. The township areas to clean were getting bigger. As one woman worker from Zondi explained:

We were 900 when we started [but] the location was not this big. It has grown... When you use a machine in Protea South, with trucks and machines, you can spend the whole month working there. So when you finish there, the area that you started with would be dirty. We do not have enough staff, as Soweto is too huge.

“The work is killing us here.”

Not surprisingly, 72% of workers in street cleaning thought that their area of work was too big to manage. Management did the following to deal with the situation. They:

- either cut the number of workers working in a particular area, and/or they increased the size of the area that a particular team had to cover
- took on a more flexible approach each day as to where they sent workers and the kinds of jobs they gave them
- introduced “gang sweeping”.

Working in isolation

Workers we interviewed felt that work was organised in a fair and scientific way before privatisation. Each worker was given a particular set of streets that she was responsible for cleaning on a weekly (or sometimes daily) basis. In some depots, the streets were actually measured, to make sure that each worker had the same length of street to clean. Workers usually worked in pairs, so that there would be at least one worker on each side of the road. This way, they could help and protect each other.

“What if I get raped while I am alone?”

But with Pikitup, workers from all depots said that some of them worked alone. Especially workers who cleaned the same streets every day in busy business districts, and workers who were cleaning illegal dumping sites in Zondi. Workers said that this made it impossible for them to complete their work:

You can finish a week without having reached the point where you are supposed to finish. And you are working both sides of the street alone.

Johannesburg has one of the highest violent crime rates in the world. Amongst these crimes are rape and robbery. Workers talked about the dangers they faced working on the streets. Many women said they had been victims of crime while at work. They said that working alone made them much less safe. One woman who swept streets in Bertrams said:

What if I get raped while I am alone?... I am working alone and what if I get to a corner and meet thugs, I may get caught in crossfire.

Women workers were also concerned that if they fell ill whilst working alone no one would be there to assist them, or even know exactly where they were. As one worker said: “You need to be two, no matter what.”

Indeed, women workers at Zondi reported a case in which a woman worker lay injured in the streets for many hours before someone came to help her.

Workers sent here and there, and gang sweeping

Management dealt with the staff shortage by using workers flexibly. They moved workers around to different areas and streets on different days. This affected workers. Some said they had worked in the same area for more than ten years. Workers said the new flexible system caused a poorer service because areas did not get cleaned often enough. They said it was better when workers worked the same area. This way, both management and the community knew exactly who was responsible for cleaning, and complaints could be dealt with more easily.

Management dealt with the staff shortage by using workers flexibly.

The move to labour flexibility in most depots included a move to the gang sweeping system. In Norwood, Selby and

Avalon this system had been adopted for either some or all of the streets that did not need to be cleaned every day. Gang sweeping teams may be big or small. They arrive in an area, clean it up and move on to the next, almost in a military style. They are sent to areas that urgently need cleaning up.

Some managers liked gang sweeping because they said it gave the vehicle driver more control over the workers, and was more efficient. But workers disagreed. They said that gang sweeping provided a poorer service. Streets did not get cleaned regularly. Workers were only sent off to an area when it was in great need and the supervisor put it first. They said:

So with that system we do not see progress. Because you sweep Lombardy. Next week you are going to Kew, and the next time you go to another place. So what about the place you left behind? Because you go there after two months or three months.

When workers were moved to different areas each day, it was difficult for the supervisor to hold any one particular worker responsible for poor quality. Workers said:

With Pikitup you know that tomorrow they are taking you to another street. So you know that someone else will come and work there tomorrow, and that person will also leave it dirty knowing that I will come to clean. So in that way it does not ensure that the place will be cleaned.

You do not work hard because it's not your place.

The new system caused tension amongst workers. It also gave them less control over their work: "They make people not to enjoy the job... because even if you are not finished they take you to another area. You know that it's not your area."

The flexible system broke up the relationships which workers had developed over years with the people who lived and worked in the areas that they serviced. It made them feel less safe. As one worker said: "People do not know you if you go to a new place... If they know me and I get bitten by a dog, they call the office. You can even die because people do not know."

When workers worked in the same area on a regular basis they came to know who the criminals were and stayed out of their way. Criminals came to know who they were. When they moved from area to area they felt unsafe, and worried they would be robbed and harmed. It is not surprising that 63% of women Pikitup workers said the safety of their working environment was not very good.

Comparing wages, benefits and conditions of employment

Wages

Pikitup's former non-permanents (the workers who had been employed as casuals by the municipality) still earned a lot less than the permanent workers did. On average, permanent workers took home R2,471 a month, compared to their R1,898. They felt the situation was highly unfair. They did not feel they were really permanent workers. But they felt they were doing the same tough job:

Yes, they [say] we are permanent but the money is not the same. And sometimes they call us non-permanents. And at the same times they are bluffing, saying we are permanents. So we want to know where we stand with Pikitup.

There was a big difference in pay between men and women in each category. Men permanent workers took home on average R436.58 more than women permanent workers. A man former non-permanent worker took home on average R282.99 more than a woman former non-permanent worker did.



The workers employed by the private company received either R30 or R35 a night.

Better off than the contractors' workers

Pikitup workers earned much more than third party contractor workers did. One Pikitup manager acknowledged:

I don't think they [third party contract wages] are anymore closer to ours. I can tell you that right now because at Marlboro there was a driver of Multiwaste who came to me begging for a job as a labourer. So I think there is huge disparity in... salaries.

On average men third party contractor workers who were paid monthly took home R1,277 a month, and women workers took home R916. But these are averages. Workers we interviewed who were employed through the truck and driver schemes (all of whom were men), and who were paid monthly, took home on average R1,996 a month. By contrast, monthly paid workers we interviewed employed in street cleaning/street cleaning and refuse collection contracts, where almost all women worked, took home an average of R1,053 a month.

With nightshift, at the Selby depot, the Pikitup workers received Pikitup wages as well as a night shift allowance. The workers employed by the private company hired by Pikitup to do some of the night shift work in other areas said that they received either R30 or R35 a night.

Workers employed through labour brokers, and who were paid daily, earned an average of R45 a day. These low wages encouraged Pikitup to use labour brokers because they helped keep costs down.

The third party contractor workers knew that they were paid much less for doing the same work as Pikitup workers. Men workers employed by third party contractors were unhappy that women who worked at Pikitup earned more than they did:

Their money is higher. I have a wife who is working there [Pikitup], but her salary is higher than mine. So it is not clear that I am working. When I come with my envelope, her wage is higher but we are doing the same job.

Some truck and driver scheme companies saved costs on labour, however, and whenever they could, for example by not paying their drivers when the trucks broke down.

Many living off little

88% of third party contractor men workers, 81% of the third party contractor women workers, and more than 90% of men and women Pikitup workers were the main breadwinners in their households. Men and women third party contractor workers and Pikitup workers each supported more than five people. Third party contractor and former non-permanent workers struggled to support their families. As one worker said:

Right now I am the only person working. My elder brother passed away and his kids (wife included) are now my responsibility... I have no other way but to be responsible, they are my family and his children are mine. Even my sisters have children and they were never married. I cannot act like I do not know them... We will all share this R900 or R1,000. I better be left with R100. It's okay because I will be able to get to work and eat or drink water. You see, life is to eat and sleep.

"...You see, life is to eat and sleep."

Benefits

Within Pikitup there were large differences in the benefits of permanent and former non-permanent workers. Permanent workers received annual leave, family responsibility leave, sick leave, study leave, annual bonuses, four months fully paid maternity leave, were members of a pension fund and registered with the unemployment insurance fund (UIF). They could get subsidised education, study leave, and access to a homeowner's scheme. They could also become members of a medical aid. Former non-permanents were given far fewer benefits, and would only get the rest over three years.

Third party contractor workers were even worse off than Pikitup's former non-permanents when it came to benefits. Many were being denied basic rights set out in the law, like weekly rest periods. Only 24% of men and 19% of women third party contractor workers received sick leave, only 22% of men and 9% of women were registered for UIF, only 13% of men and 19% of women received family responsibility leave, and only 16% of women could get maternity leave. Other third party contractor workers' problems included:

- almost none got benefits, like medical aid, housing loans or study leave
- less than a third got an annual bonus
- only 36% of men and 26% of women got annual leave
- over 60% of men and 97% of women did not have a pension or provident fund
- employers threatened and intimidated them from joining unions
- not getting payslips – this made it hard for them to know about deductions and benefits.

Third party contractor workers thought that management was afraid to give them either payslips or letters confirming their employment because "they are scared that someone will find out that they are underpaying us".

Third party contractor workers really had it bad with both wages and benefits. But women were worse off than the men. This was because of the different kinds of work that they did, and the different employers that they worked for. Workers employed by truck and driver schemes had the best wages and benefits. But no women were employed in these contracts.

Protective clothing and equipment

When workers moved from the municipality to Pikitup there had been a big change in the quality and number of uniforms and protective equipment given to them. Workers in all but one depot only received one uniform. They had to wash it every night, or wear the old municipal uniforms. This affected all workers equally in the workplace. But because men workers were less likely than women to be responsible for household chores, at least they could rely on a woman in their household to help them wash the uniforms. Most women workers had to do it themselves. Workers complained

“When I pick up dirt at the dumpsite, I use my hand and I come with a bottle cut, and I tell them that I have been injured, they will tell me that it’s because I’m careless.”



Dress parade at Pikitup

that there was a shortage of gloves and boots.

When I pick up dirt at the dumpsite, I use my hand and I come with a bottle cut, and I tell them that I have been injured, they will tell me that it’s because I’m careless. We used to have a manager here [when they worked for the municipality], and we would not go out and work without gloves or boots. Right now I wear slippers to work.

65% of Pikitup workers said the quality of their work clothing was worse or much worse than when they were with the municipality. 44% said the same of their personal protection equipment.

Managers at the depots agreed with workers’ concerns. They thought it wrong that Pikitup was trying to cut costs this way. They said that Pikitup should provide protective clothing and equipment according to the law. And it should care about how its workers look in public. They said that when workers wore the old municipal uniforms it undid all the marketing work that Pikitup was spending so much money on to make the company look good in the eyes of the public.

But once again, third party contractor workers had it much worse. 65% did not receive overalls, 85% did not receive raincoats, more than 90% did not receive shirts, hats or boots. 54% of third party contractor workers said they do not even receive gloves. In each case, women were less likely to be given protective clothing than men. Workers noted that some companies were worse than others.

Many of the third party contractor workers had to buy their own protective clothing. Because they earn very low wages, this caused even greater difficulties for the third party contractor workers.

Some workers in Alexandra wore plastic bags over their shoes to protect them and make them last longer. Workers in Orange Farm said they wore plastic bags on their hands when they were cleaning dumping sites. Workers employed on the night shift contract complained that it took up to six months for the employer to replace broken gloves.

Facilities

The five Pikitup depots had change rooms with toilets and showers for men and women workers. But the satellite depots at Poortjie and Central Camp did not have any showers. Although the main depots provided workers with cleaning facilities and toilets, often there were not enough. For example, at Selby depot there was only one shower for every 65 men workers, and one toilet for every 66 men. Across the five depots, being fewer, women generally had better access to facilities than men.



Working in Alexandra without proper protective clothing.

Many third party contractor workers began and ended their days at the Pikitup depots. But they were not allowed to use its washing and toilet facilities. Others reported to work at their employer's house.

About 70% of both men and women third party contractor workers had toilets they could use when they arrived at work. But less than 8% of them were given soap. 43% of men had hot showers they could use, but only 21% of women had the same. 47% of men had access to cold showers, compared to 22% of women. 34% of men had access to single sex change rooms, compared to 17% of women.

Both Pikitup and third party contractor workers who worked in the business districts found it easier to find toilets to use. But those working in residential areas had to ask residents' permission to use theirs. Many said no. This was especially true in more middle class areas where the toilets were inside the houses.

Some community members feel scared that the worker may steal, or they do not want someone so dirty in their homes. When asked about community members, workers told us that:

Yes, they call us 'dogs' or 'stinking things'... When one asks to use the toilet they will say 'try next door'... Sometimes you ask for water and they give it to you in a glass. But once you turn your back to leave they just break it or throw it away... After work, when we are no longer in overalls but looking smart, they do not recognise us.

Because of a lack of public facilities workers are often forced to relieve themselves in bushes and open spaces. At least it is easier for men to relieve themselves. This is more difficult for women. They are more looked down on for urinating in public. One woman worker was arrested for public indecency when she was forced to urinate in the street. It is even more difficult for women when they are menstruating. These problems are not new. Even in the days of the municipality there were not enough public toilets. But workers told us that the situation has become worse. This is because the municipality has broken down some of the toilets in places like parks. Also, because residents are struggling to pay their water bills they do not want a stranger flushing their toilet and using their water. One worker said:

Sometimes you would ask to use the toilet; and the owner of the house would come and tell you that I am paying for the water that you are using. When the toilet gets blocked, I have to pay for it. So go to your father the municipality and tell him that he must give you a toilet, he must provide you with a toilet. They chase you away.



Workers at Marlboro depot



Pikitup worker

Different employers but one understanding

The workers hired by third party contractors knew that they were doing Pikitup's work. They saw Pikitup (and the municipality) as being responsible for their working conditions. Some workers said their problems would be solved if the municipality hired them directly. However, others felt that Pikitup and the municipality should make sure that third party contractor workers shared the same conditions as Pikitup workers. But this is unlikely to happen because one of the council's main reasons for privatisation and outsourcing was so that it would cost less. As some Pikitup workers said: "They know that contract people get less money. So if they hire people they would get the same salary as we do."

A senior manager at Pikitup head office agreed that the lower wages paid to third party contract workers was one of the key advantages of outsourcing and privatisation.

Third party contractors: abide by the bargaining council – if you want to

Pikitup belongs to the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC). This council sets wages and benefits for municipal workers. But private companies do not have to abide by these agreements. The Road Freight Bargaining Council sets the wages and benefits for workers who work with trucks, like drivers, operators and loaders. Its wages and benefits are lower than those of the SALGBC. This is one of the reasons Pikitup wants to hire third party contractors. As a senior manager at Pikitup head office noted: "... Their wages are low... if we go to our own bargaining council then there is no financial gain whatsoever."

But many contractors seemed to be paying their workers lower than the Road Freight Bargaining Council wages. The workers suffered, but the bosses and Pikitup benefited. By underpaying workers, the bosses could make more profit, and could still charge Pikitup less money to do the job. Street cleaners who did not work with trucks did not come under the Road Freight Bargaining Council and were not protected by it. There were no minimum wages for these workers. This mainly affected women, because third party contractor women workers were all employed in street cleaning. Men employed in street cleaning who did not load bags also suffered the same fate.

Working hours

Workers worked less overtime with Pikitup than they used to when employed by the municipality. This meant they earned less take home pay. It has also meant the community received a poorer service. The Norwood depot manager said businesses and restaurants often complained about this, and she faced pressure to increase overtime.

Workers in the truck and driver schemes argued that they worked longer hours than the Pikitup drivers, and felt this was wrong:

We are doing the same work as the municipality work, but I can say that there are divisions. Like the municipality drivers are supposed to knock-off at 14:00 and the sub-contract drivers knock off at 15:30 but we are doing the same job.

Third party contractor workers in Orange Farm were regularly expected to work unpaid overtime. They said:

No, we do not get paid overtime ever... By the time we knock off, some people are shaking and sick after having worked for a long time. Nobody cares... Even when it is raining we are told to go and work, and still there is no overtime!

“By the time we knock off, some people are shaking and sick after having worked for a long time.”

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) says there must be weekly rest periods. But workers employed by a third party contractor to do night shift at Selby depot reported that they worked 365 nights a year. One worker said: “We work 365 days. No leave, no nothing.” Another worker added: “If you stay at home they’ll take the money. You must get someone to work in your space. You cannot just stay home without a reason.”

Most of these workers lived in Alexandra township, near the company’s offices. Each evening they reported to the offices and were transported to Johannesburg’s inner city. At the end of their shift they were transported back to the offices. Those workers who lived close enough to the offices walked back home through the dangerous township in the dark. Others, who lived farther away would sleep in front of the building across the road from the offices, and walk home at dawn. Women and men who worked for this company had almost no time for the family and housework. One woman worker said:

The only time you have with your child is in the morning when you come back from work and at two in the afternoon when she comes back from school. Sometimes when she comes back from school she finds that you are still at home. That’s the time you can have with them.

Given the gender roles women were expected to play, after working all night, women were still responsible for cooking, cleaning, shopping and taking care of their children.

Women workers said they had about four hours sleep a night. They said that about four times a month they would be too exhausted to work. They arranged for someone else to work in their place. The worker would then have to pay that person his or her day’s wages.



Changes in vehicles and in technology

Superfleet is a private company that, over five years, is meant to replace Pikitup’s fleet of vehicles. In 2001, the council decided to outsource all of its vehicles to Superfleet. But not everyone agreed with it. Management liked it better before when they had contracts with the truck and driver schemes. They said contracts were cheaper than working with Superfleet. And there were fewer problems with workers and vehicle breakdowns. Before, for example, if a contractor’s truck broke down, the contractor would have to provide another one. But with Superfleet they complained that they had to wait, sometimes for days, to get a vehicle. It meant the garbage was not collected quickly.

Management preferred the truck and driver third party contractor schemes because companies competed against each other for work. This kept prices down. It was also easier to

break workers' strikes when workers worked for different companies and were not unionised. With the Superfleet contract, Pikitup had to hire its own drivers, who were usually union members.

Having fewer trucks caused delays in providing a service. It sometimes meant workers had to work later in the day in the boiling sun, and finished later. Workers were also concerned that communities had to wait longer for their garbage to be removed, a service they paid for. Because only men worked in collection they bore the brunt of these problems. But in at least one depot women and men in street cleaning were also affected by the shortage of vehicles. At Norwood depot because of the shortage of trucks, street cleaners started work several hours late each day. This meant that the sun was already high when they started work on the streets.

Equipment

Pikitup managers and workers in street cleaning and collection were unhappy with the quality of some of the third party contractors' equipment. Women workers in Orange Farm, for example, noted that the only equipment they received were metal rakes and sharp sticks to pick up litter. When equipment broke, rather than replacing it, management would get someone to weld it back together. The Pikitup supervisor monitoring the Orange Farm contractors said they had outdated equipment and that Pikitup's would be able to do a better job.

From their side, workers in truck and driver schemes said that Pikitup forced them to overuse and overload their vehicles:

I think they want to overwork our trucks so that we go out of business... They save their trucks... We are always followed around by the inspectors from Pikitup to see if our trucks are fully loaded... If you are found waiting, we are asked why are we waiting but the same is not done to the Pikitup workers...

The municipality says that they expect 30 loads from [each of] us per day, but the municipality people only make 18 loads, and they are never asked why.

Rather work for the municipality

Of the third party contractor workers, 79% said they would rather work for the municipality, which they saw as the same as working for Pikitup. They said things like job security, wages, benefits and protective clothing were better at Pikitup. Workers said:

There is more money at Pikitup. They also get overalls. When your broom gets finished you get another immediately. If your gloves get finished they give you new ones, because they know you must not be exposed to germs. But at [our company] you can even get germs, you get human blood and you have to clean it with hands, because if you are wearing a plastic it gets torn. We'd like to work for Pikitup... They must take [us] in... so that we can get more money and feed our families.

Many third party contractor workers did not support privatisation. One said:

I am working for a private company only because I am suffering. But personally I like working for the municipality. The private companies do not have our future at heart.

71% of Pikitup workers we interviewed also wished they could work directly for the municipality. One worker said:

It is better that we go back to the municipality because the municipality was giving us everything. Pikitup lied to us that we would never run short of anything; they will even give us more money.

Pikitup workers were worried that one day they would find themselves in the same situation as the third party contract workers.

Pikitup and third party contractor workers also had strong feelings about privatisation in general. Men felt more strongly than women about privatisation. 65% of men and 54% of women argued that they would prefer the municipality to provide services where they live.

Former whites-only areas: still brighter

71% of third party contractor workers believed that workers who worked in the former white residential areas had better working conditions than workers in townships.

More than half of both men and women Pikitup and third party contract workers thought that townships received services that were worse than the former whites-only suburbs. 68% of Pikitup workers and 71% of third party contractor workers believed that workers who worked in the former white residential areas had better working conditions than workers in townships. Over half of Pikitup third party contractor workers thought that workers in suburbs received better equipment.

Free cleaning work!

Women workers' double burden

Most workers live in the very townships that they think are getting a worse service. Workers' lives at home were badly affected when the garbage removal service was bad. They said that children were particularly affected. As one woman worker said:

Yesterday I found something I don't like in a dump. I found that they threw away injections and condoms. And the children go to the dump and play there. I don't know why children like dumps. They play there. But I could not approach the person even though I knew who it was, to tell him that what he was doing is bad for the children because children play with these condoms they say they're balloons. So that is filthy, and it's bad for us because after work you have to go and clean that dump because the children will get injured.

The main responsibility for looking after children fell on women workers' shoulders. 69% of women Pikitup workers and 52% of women third party contractor workers said they were the main ones responsible for childcare in their households. Far fewer men workers (less than 23%) had this responsibility.

53% of women Pikitup workers and 71% of women third party contractor workers said they were the main people responsible for sweeping the yard at home, compared to 20% of men Pikitup workers and 38% of men third party contractor workers.

Bad service delivery means more work for women

Women land up with more unpaid work when garbage removal and street sweeping is not done regularly and properly. This is unlikely to change without women winning the struggle for gender equality in the home and men agreeing to share the work.

Some men said that they swept when their wives were not around but did not if she was there. They said that they would be very embarrassed if others were to see them doing household chores:

I think it's her job and she is stuck with it. I can only do it if I really have to help. I do not think I can wash dishes with my friends around... but even I cannot stand it, if I enter your house and find your wife reading a newspaper and you standing washing the dishes. Or you are changing a baby's napkin while the woman is sitting with crossed legs.

Men spoke about traditional roles being kept at home. The men who worked as sweepers felt there was no contradiction between them sweeping at work, but not sweeping at home. As one man, a migrant worker, noted:

You know what, in my culture a woman, even if she is a working woman, every day in the morning she must wake up, sweep the whole house, and after that she must cook. Again she must see to it that the bed is made up and the dishes are washed, etc. When I go home I go there to rest. When I am here I work and send her the money which she does not know where it comes from.

Some men seemed to feel that they would do housework if they got paid to. Because they were migrants, 36% of men Pikitup workers lived in hostels. Overall, 23% of men workers lived alone. Men workers who lived alone and could not afford a domestic worker did chores, including sweeping. But they did not do this happily. As one worker said: "If it's dirty I do sweep. What's the problem with that? I stay alone, so I have to do it."

However, he added that if he were not staying alone he would not do most of the chores, as he did not like doing them. Most women do not have this kind of choice.

The municipality, Pikitup, and the third party contractors and men all benefit from the traditional black community expectation that women must keep yards and streets clean. Women workers from the Norwood depot who cleaned in former white suburbs felt that the townships were cleaner than the suburbs. They noted that whites did not sweep in front of their houses. Management at the Zondi depot said that because women in the townships do sweeping work for free they did not need to provide sweeping services in the township like they did in the suburbs:

There's a total difference between here and the suburbs. Because here they wake up in the morning and they sweep in front of their yard.

All areas of the municipality were affected by the decline in street cleaning services. But different kinds of plans were made to address these problems in the wealthy and the working-class areas.

Volunteers

Both the Johannesburg city council and Pikitup encouraged community members to volunteer and sweep their streets for free. Ward councillors are expected to make sure that an environmental committee is set up in their ward. They often focus on cleaning up the ward. Pikitup's environmental management section has divided Johannesburg into regions, each with a manager and an educator. One of their tasks is to work with local politicians to get clean-up campaigns going. There have also been several big campaigns, including Tidy Jozi and Joburg Unite. Many community groups and youth

Volunteers lived on broken dreams and false hopes...

associations have taken up quick volunteer clean-up campaigns. With lots of different volunteer work in different places, it is hard to say how many volunteers' free labour Johannesburg city and Pikitup have benefited from. We found that even some Pikitup workers joined in volunteer cleaning if their area was not properly serviced.

Usually volunteers did not receive any pay, food or uniforms. Some did not even receive tools, and brought their own brooms and equipment from home.

It was only township folk who did long-term volunteering. In the former whites-only areas, people organised short clean-up campaigns, often with school children. Pikitup gave them plastic bags, and transported the rubbish to the dumping sites. But Pikitup management complained that this cost them money but did not benefit Pikitup. This was because the campaigns in white areas usually cleaned parks and rivers. These are not part of the areas that Pikitup has to clean. Pikitup managers agreed that township volunteers who worked every day helped the company a lot. Both men and women worked as long-term volunteers in the townships. But the majority of the volunteers were women.

Many people who volunteered through councillors' campaigns hoped they would get a job with Pikitup this way. But this was unlikely. Pikitup had stopped hiring new workers years ago. Volunteers lived on broken dreams and false hopes because while they continued to do the job for free, there was no pressure on Pikitup or third party contractors to hire new workers. Since street sweeping and litter picking were jobs that women were hired to do, they were mainly the ones losing out.

Zivuseni poverty alleviation project

The Gauteng government established the Zivuseni poverty alleviation programme in April 2002. As part of Zivuseni there was a special project that hired workers to do waste management work. These workers were linked to Pikitup's Zondi depot in Soweto. The Zivuseni workers cleaned illegal dumping sites and did litter picking in the streets. They worked with Zondi depot workers, who also supervised them. But the Zivuseni workers' conditions were far worse than the Pikitup workers' were. Because it was a special poverty alleviation project, the provincial government did not have to abide by many parts of the BCEA.

The people who worked for Zivuseni were legally classified as workers. But the Zivuseni Project co-ordinators called them "beneficiaries". The Zivuseni workers received far lower pay and less protective clothing than Pikitup workers. They earned R40 a day. They were given one jacket and pair of pants, a cap and gloves. They were not given shoes or boots. The Zivuseni workers knew their jobs were insecure, and that their wages and working conditions were far worse than



Zivuseni workers

Pikitup workers. They said: “We are not registered. We are just contract, and we earn R40 a day. So we said we will accept it because we are suffering.”

However, the Zivuseni workers’ wages and conditions of work were similar to, and sometimes even better than, the third party contract workers doing street cleaning and collection. The Zivuseni workers were being paid to do work to help alleviate very serious poverty. Yet they earned the same, or even more, than third party contract workers. This alone showed how badly the third party contractors were paying their workers.

Zivuseni employed more women than men. The women felt that this was because men were not willing to work for such low wages. And also because they worried that people would make fun of them for working with waste. The women and men who were employed by Zivuseni overlooked these issues because they were desperate. As one woman noted:

When they [people] pass you working there they laugh, and say funny things like ‘I would never do such a job’. So if you are poor you just tell yourself that let me do the job, because you can never compare yourself to people who are better off.

The Zivuseni project helped Pikitup financially because it filled the gap left by workers it did not replace. The province paid for the Zivuseni workers, but the workers knew they were doing Pikitup’s work. As one woman worker said: “I thought I was working for the municipality because it was their job.”

The first group of Zivuseni workers did not fight for better wages and conditions of work. But the second group did. They saw they were doing the same work as Pikitup workers but being paid less. So the Zivuseni workers organised and refused to do work that was too difficult, or to work when it became too hot. Pikitup management became worried that the Zivuseni workers’ militancy would spill over to its workers. So it made them report for work and have their dress parade somewhere else.

The rich make a plan

Businesses in wealthy areas have made a plan to help clean some of the richer shopping areas of the city. They have identified city improvement districts (CIDs), which at the time of this research included Sandton City in the area covered by Marlboro depot, Rosebank in the Norwood depot area, and a number of improvement districts in the inner city area, which Selby depot was responsible for. In a CID, local businesses themselves contract private cleaning and security companies. They do this to make the area look sparkling clean and feel safe. All except two of the 83 CID street cleaners who were employed by the CIDs in the depot areas that we studied were men. Hiring men seemed to be deliberate because businesses wanted to show a strong male presence. They did this because they felt this would make people feel safer. The CID cleaners wore military style uniforms that, except for the colour, looked the same as the CID security guards’. The CID street sweepers saw themselves as doing two jobs. As one worker said:

... We are actually doing a double job. Because they say that when we see criminals we must give a report. That is the job of the security. But you will never see security guys sweeping. So you can see that we are doing double job in that way.

They were doing a “double” job but they were paid lower wages than the security workers. This was because they were not formally employed in the security sector. The CID street cleaning workers’ wages were higher than third party contractors’ workers employed in street cleaning contracts. Their benefits and protective clothing were much better. Four out of ten of the CID workers who were interviewed were union

members, which is a much larger proportion than for third party contract workers.

The CIDs helped Pikitup financially because the Pikitup depots did not service the areas where the CID workers swept. Pikitup was able to redeploy its workers to other areas serviced by the depot.



Things not right with privatisation

Privatisation brought with it fewer jobs and worse working conditions in waste management jobs, especially for people who worked for third party contractors. Women workers were the worst affected. Privatisation also brought about dirtier townships, causing more work to fall on women in the community. Pikitup and the third party contracts saved money by cutting down on the number of workers that they used for street cleaning. The volunteer programmes, Zivuseni and CIDs helped them to do this. Women lost out, because this meant there were fewer jobs available for them in Pikitup and the third party contractor companies.

We can hear the echoes of many workers' voices we interviewed, calling for the municipality to take back waste management services as its job. ○

Summary of our research findings



Summary of our research findings



Women workers did not like working in isolation.

This book aims to help unionists, local government councillors, municipal officials and policy makers understand more about how privatisation of waste management affects men and women differently. This chapter summarises the main research findings. We hope that, together with the introduction and the case studies, it will help you to identify issues to look at when you do a gender analysis of policies, like privatisation, in other municipalities.

More and more local governments across South Africa are privatising their waste management systems. They are responding to national government's push to get the private sector more involved in providing basic services. Councils are privatising either by turning their municipal departments into private companies, or by contracting the private sector to do the job for them. The move towards privatising municipal services, like waste management, has sped up in many countries around the world. But who are the biggest winners and losers in this push to include the private sector in delivering basic services? And in particular, how are women being affected? We studied three South African municipalities to find out. The following pages are a summary of our findings.

Three South African case studies

Our case studies show how the privatisation of waste management in Sol Plaatje, Thabazimbi and Johannesburg has not benefited waste management workers or black working-class communities. The case studies show the problems that the privatisation of waste management has caused. We found that men and women had been affected differently by privatisation, and that for the most part black women workers and women in black working-class communities were worst off. This was because of the gender division of labour between women and men in workplaces, households and communities. It was also because of the gender implications of the way in which collective bargaining happens in the waste management sector. The work that most women did was not protected by collective bargaining agreements, whereas many of the jobs men did were.

Although each place had privatised in a different way, similar issues came out of all of the case studies.

General research findings

Here we look at some of the general findings that came out of our research.

Forget about the workers

We looked at many contracts that the three councils had made with private companies. Not one contract said that a company had to obey labour laws or bargaining council agreements. By law of course they still had to. But because the contracts were silent on workers' rights, the councils did not check that the companies upheld them. Municipal managers and councillors kept saying that it was not their responsibility to do this. They said this even though they thought that some of the companies were breaking the law. This way, the councils turned a blind eye to the exploitation of workers employed by private waste management companies.

The South African Constitution says that delivering waste management services is one of local government's responsibilities. When councils contract private waste management companies to deliver services for them, those companies are helping them to do their duty. It was therefore a great concern that the councils refused to make sure that the companies they contracted obeyed the country's laws. It was of equal concern that the unions in the three municipalities had not done anything to challenge them on this.

Labour laws and workers' rights

South Africa has many labour laws that protect workers' rights. Here are some key rights. These rights apply to all workers, including waste management workers employed by municipalities and private companies. Some of the rights in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) and Unemployment Insurance Act do not apply to workers who work less than 24 hours a month for the same employer. But in our three case studies only a handful of workers employed by private companies in Johannesburg worked for less than 24 hours a month. Therefore almost all of the other workers we studied should have been receiving the following rights:

Labour Relations Act

- the right to join a union
- protection against unfair dismissal

Basic Conditions of Employment Act

- 45 hours of ordinary work each week
- overtime paid at one-and-a-half times the normal wage and two times the normal wage on Sunday or a public holiday
- weekly rest period of 36 hours in a row
- regular medical checkups for workers who work night shift
- 21 days annual leave in a row, or one day for every 17 days worked
- up to six weeks paid sick leave every three years
- four months maternity leave
- three days family responsibility leave
- a proper payslip

Occupational Health and Safety Act

- change rooms
- showers
- hot and cold water
- towels
- soap
- protective clothing and equipment

Unemployment Insurance Act

- registration with the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF)
- UIF payments if the worker is dismissed
- payments from the UIF for maternity leave

It costs more if you cannot monitor contracts

Other research on privatisation done in South Africa and around the world shows that often municipalities are not able to monitor whether private companies are doing their job properly. They are also not always able to force companies to do all the work they have been contracted to do. We found this happened in the two smaller municipalities that we studied, Thabazimbi and Sol Plaatje. Neither of the municipalities had a proper system in place to monitor the companies that they had contracted. They also did not have enough staff to check on what the companies were doing. As a result, the private companies got away with providing low quality waste management services, and the councils did not get everything they were paying for. In both Sol Plaatje and Thabazimbi the councils ended up paying twice for some of their waste management services. They paid the private company, and then they also ended up using their own workers, machines and equipment to make up for the poor job being done by the private company.

In Thabazimbi, another reason that the municipality continued to do waste management work was because the council had forgotten to include some of the waste management work it wanted the company to do in the contract. This mistake happened even though the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Unit had provided consultants to help the municipality to draft the contract!

Black economic empowerment

In recent years national, provincial and local governments in South Africa have all been committed to promoting black economic empowerment (BEE). Private companies need a lot of money to put in water and electricity systems. This means it is hard for new, black companies to win contracts to privatise these services. A much smaller investment is needed to provide waste management services. This is why in both Johannesburg and Sol Plaatje the municipalities decided that waste management was an important service in which to promote BEE. They gave contracts for collection and street cleaning in some or all of their townships to companies that claimed to promote BEE. Pikitup also entered truck and driver contracts with black-owned companies.

Our research found some important problems with the BEE contracts.

- The contracts favoured the company owners instead of the communities they served. For example, the contracts allowed the companies to have a very long time to solve problems with the service that they delivered to the community. This meant communities received a poor quality service.
- In Johannesburg and Sol Plaatje, municipal managers either had problems with the quality of service delivery, or had received tenders from white-owned companies that said they could do the work at a lower cost. However, they felt pressured to keep the BEE contractors on. This was because of their commitment to BEE and the BEE company owners. They put the companies' interests above communities' needs for a good quality service, and the council's interest in saving money.
- The BEE contracts, like all the other company contracts, did not say anything about workers' rights or bargaining council agreements. Although some of the BEE companies in Johannesburg said they tried to obey labour laws and bargaining council agreements, the other BEE companies were amongst the worst employers that we studied.

All of these issues raised important concerns about BEE contracts in waste management. The company owners were black, but so were the workers who were

being exploited and so were the communities who were receiving a bad service. The research found a class bias in the way that local governments approach BEE. They saw BEE as being about creating a small black bourgeoisie, and they were willing to sacrifice black workers and working-class communities in the process.

Still apartheid

During apartheid, black townships received bad services, including waste management. Our research found that privatisation was not doing much to make the quality of waste management services to black townships equal to former white suburbs. Some workers thought the situation had become even worse since privatisation. Black working-class women suffered most from this. The burden fell on them to cope with the extra cleaning work in their households and communities, and the sicknesses and health problems that came from receiving poor waste management services.

Apartheid-style service delivery affected workers as well as communities in black working-class areas. The same company delivered waste management services to all parts of Thabazimbi – the suburbs, the townships and the business district. The company used only one truck, and all workers in street cleaning received the same equipment. But in Johannesburg and Sol Plaatje, many workers thought that workers in townships received equipment that was worse than the equipment used by workers in the suburbs. And in all three municipalities workers thought that working conditions in the townships were worse than in the suburbs.



Gender analysis

Many of the issues we have raised have also arisen in other research on privatisation. This book, however, focuses on gender issues. Our case studies show that:

- Privatisation of waste management took advantage of inequalities between men and women, and often made these even worse.
- Privatisation affected both men and women workers badly, but because of the gender division of labour in the workplace, community and home, they were affected differently. In most cases black women workers and community members suffered most.
- To understand the effect of the privatisation of waste management you have to understand how men and women workers are differently affected in the workplace, community, and at home.



Next we offer a summary of the most important gender-

related issues that came out of the case studies. In the case studies themselves you will find facts and other information to back up our arguments.

Gender division of labour

Waste management in South Africa is a man's world. It has only been since the 1980s in Johannesburg, and the 1990s in Thabazimbi and Sol Plaatje that women began to get paid jobs in waste management. When we did our research we found that far more men than women had jobs in the waste management sector. Most workers employed in the sector were men. Therefore, more men than women were affected by changes in the sector, including by privatisation.

Women were kept in street cleaning work because of strong gender stereotypes.

We have already said that waste management employers exploited differences between women and men. They divided the work along gender lines.

- Most workers employed in waste management either worked in street cleaning or collection. Street cleaning includes street sweeping, litter picking and cleaning of illegal dumping sites. There was a very strong gender division of labour here. In all three municipalities almost all of the women worked in the street cleaning section.
- Women were kept in street cleaning work because of strong gender stereotypes. Regarding these stereotypes, most people we interviewed believed that street cleaning was a good job for women because it is women's work to sweep and clean at home. They also said that it was just natural for women to do this kind of work, and that this could not be changed. They said this even though women had only started working in the sector in the last 20 years or so.
- Many people we interviewed said that women were not strong enough to load bags and bins onto trucks. They also said that men work better with technology and trucks.
- The gender division of labour also existed in workers' homes and communities. Women workers were paid to sweep for the municipality and the private companies, and they did the same job for free for their family members. Women waste management workers were likely to start their day by sweeping their yard and the street in front of their homes. They were not alone in this. Most black working-class women were expected to be responsible for cleaning at home and in the neighbourhoods. Some men also swept at home, but they were in the minority. They mostly only swept at home when their wives were sick or when they lived alone.

Privatisation did not create the gender division of labour in waste management. For many generations women have been responsible for cleaning at home. And since women started being employed in the waste management sector they have always worked in street cleaning. But, as privatisation happened, men and women were affected differently because of the gender division of labour. In the next section we look at what this meant for the three municipalities that we studied.

Cutting costs and boosting profits

Municipalities collect garbage and clean the streets because the Constitution says that it is local governments' responsibility to do so. Private companies seek contracts to do the work for one simple reason – they want to make money. If they cannot make a profit, private companies will not provide waste management services. Our case studies found that private companies used four main ways to cut costs so that they could make more profit.

They:

- put their company costs onto workers
- cut down on the number and quality of vehicles and equipment
- paid workers lower wages and offered few benefits
- cut down on the labour force so their wage bill was less.

Each of these ways of making more money affected men and women differently because of the gender division of labour. Councillors', government's and private business' responses to the labour shortage also affected men and women workers differently.

Private companies: putting company costs onto workers



To save money and make more profits private waste management providers all spent as little money as possible. They transferred as many costs as they could to the workers. This meant that most workers:

- took home even less money because they had to pay for some of their work items out of their own pockets
- were not treated with dignity
- were not as safe at work as they should have been.

Changing and cleaning facilities

Many private companies did not provide workers with washing and changing facilities. This meant that workers, both men and women, had to arrive at work dressed for the working day. After spending all day collecting rotting and stinking rubbish, the workers had to travel home without washing or changing into clean clothes. At home, they had to pay for the water and soap to clean with. In Thabazimbi and Sol Plaatje, both men and women workers were equally affected by the lack of facilities. But in Johannesburg, men third party contractor workers were more likely to have work facilities they could use than women workers were.



Protective work clothes

Many private company workers complained that they were not given enough gloves at work. Some received none at all. This made the work of picking up garbage a big health and safety risk for them.

Private companies paid very low wages to their workers. On top of this, many of them expected their workers to pay for their own work clothes. In Johannesburg, men employed by private companies had better protective clothing than women did. In Sol Plaatje and Thabazimbi, men and women were equally affected by not having either proper or enough protective clothing. But, they were differently affected when

they returned home. Women workers everywhere were more likely to be responsible for household chores in their homes. This meant that most men had women in their households washing their very dirty work clothes for them. Women did not enjoy the same privilege, and washed their own.

Private companies: cut down on vehicles and equipment

Private waste management providers saved money by cutting down on the quality and number of vehicles and equipment they used. This was particularly true in Thabazimbi, Sol Plaatje, and Orange Farm in Johannesburg. Bad quality vehicles broke down often. This meant garbage was not removed when it should have been. Sometimes it would be days, and even weeks before the garbage was collected.

Only men did garbage collection. So they were more affected by the breakdowns and delays. In all three municipalities, men were more likely than women to have to knock off work late because they had to finish the work. But women workers were more likely to have to deal with the mess created by poor collection when they returned home from work.

Women were also affected by problems with vehicles. In Thabazimbi, the municipality had a special vehicle for the narrow streets of Ipelegeng township. The private company only had one vehicle, and it was too big to enter the streets of Ipelegeng, so women in street cleaning had to carry the refuse bags and bins to the ring road. In Pikitup's Norwood depot, street cleaners started work late each day because they had to wait for the truck to drop off some of the collection workers first. This meant they started work once the sun was already high, which made the work harder. Women in street cleaning were also badly affected because many private companies did not provide them with proper equipment to clean the streets.

Private companies: pay lower wages and offer fewer benefits

In each of our three case studies we found that on average private company workers earned much lower wages and got fewer benefits than municipal workers. This was another way that private companies boosted their profits. We found that generally women were even worse off than men. To understand why private companies can do this, and why women are even worse off than the men, we have to take three things into account:

- how collective bargaining works in the waste management sector
- how collective agreements and labour laws are enforced
- whether workers are unionised.

Collective bargaining in the waste management sector

Most sectors of the South African economy have national bargaining councils. The councils are where trade unions and employers negotiate agreements on issues like wages and benefits. All municipal workers fall under the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC). Whatever job they do both men and women municipal workers benefit from the agreements. The South African Local Government Association (Salga), the South African Municipal Workers' Union (Samwu), and the Independent Municipal and Allied Trade Union (Imatu) are the parties to this bargaining council.

Most sectors of the South African economy have national bargaining councils. The councils are where trade unions and employers negotiate agreements on issues like wages and benefits.

Private company workers lose out

There is no bargaining council in South Africa that negotiates agreements for the private street cleaning sector.

The SALGBC's constitution says that its agreements apply to employers and employees who do anything normally done by a municipality. Municipalities hire private companies to collect garbage and clean the streets. Those companies are doing something normally done by the municipality. When Johannesburg turned its waste management department into the private company it owns called Pikitup, it was agreed that Pikitup and its workers should come under the SALGBC. But Salga has not agreed that private waste management companies and their workers should also be covered by SALGBC agreements. So, private company workers like those we interviewed in Thabazimbi and Sol Plaatje, and the third party contractor workers in Johannesburg do not benefit from the SALGBC agreements, even though they all do work that would normally be done by a municipality.

There is another bargaining council that covers some of the workers employed by private waste management companies. The Road Freight Bargaining Council (RFBC) negotiates agreements for workers who work with trucks. In the waste management sector this includes drivers, operators and loaders. However, even though the RFBC negotiates wages and benefits, these are worse than in the municipal sector. In 2002/2003, the minimum wage in the RFBC was the equivalent of R1,234 a month. But in the SALGBC it was R2,100 a month! This is one of the reasons municipalities want to privatise. They know that private companies can pay workers lower wages and offer fewer benefits compared to municipal workers. They believe they can save money by privatising.

Private company loaders, drivers and operators get lower wages and fewer benefits than municipal workers do, but they do at least benefit from the agreements and protection of the RFBC. However, because of the gender division of labour, all of these workers are men. What about the women and men who work in street cleaning?

There is no bargaining council in South Africa that negotiates agreements for the private street cleaning sector. Using the BCEA, the minister of labour can set minimum wages and conditions of employment in different sectors. This has been done for domestic workers. It has also been done for contract cleaning companies who hire workers to clean the offices of other companies. This, however, has not been done for workers employed by private street cleaning companies.

Even when private waste management companies obey the RFBC agreements and labour laws, they are allowed to pay all workers lower wages and benefits than the municipalities. There is nothing to stop them from paying women and men employed in street cleaning even less.

This is why there are very big differences in wages between



municipal and private sector workers in the three municipalities. And also why, on average in Johannesburg and Thabazimbi, women workers earned less than men workers. It was because almost all of them worked in street cleaning.

Ignoring labour laws and agreements

Not all men working in collection earned the minimum wages and benefits set out by the RFBC. For example, in Sol Plaatje there was almost no difference in the wages paid to the men and the women employed by the entrepreneurs. And they were paid far less than the minimum wages for loaders and drivers. A number of private waste management companies in Sol Plaatje and Johannesburg seemed to have decided that they would not obey bargaining council agreements. They just went ahead and paid lower wages, and offered fewer benefits.

The entrepreneurs in Sol Plaatje, and many of the third party contractors in Johannesburg also ignored labour laws. In our research we found that many workers:

- reported that they did not receive payslips
- were not registered for unemployment insurance
- did not receive benefits such as sick leave, annual leave and family responsibility leave
- were threatened with dismissal if they spoke about joining a union.

Most private company workers did not belong to trade unions.

Private companies contracted by the municipalities got away with ignoring labour laws and bargaining council agreements because:

- Not a single contract said companies had to obey labour laws and bargaining council agreements. So municipalities did not monitor them.
- The RFBC and the Department of Labour did not have enough inspectors to monitor companies. Workers from at least one company told us they had struggled for months to get a Department of Labour inspector to inspect their working conditions.
- Most private company workers did not belong to trade unions. Although workers knew that their companies were breaking labour laws and collective agreements, they did not have a union to help them. For the women and men who were not covered by the RFBC, there was no union to negotiate wages and benefits on their behalf.

When private companies broke the law and did not follow bargaining council agreements they saved even more money and made even more profits. They did this by denying workers what was rightfully theirs. Men in collection lost the privileges that they had gained from the RFBC. And both men and women workers suffered when companies broke labour laws.

Private companies: cutting down the workforce, cutting down on costs

The last way that private companies saved money was by cutting down their workforces. The Sol Plaatje municipality and Johannesburg council's company Pikitup did the same. There were staff shortages in all three municipalities.

Garbage collection put first

In all three municipalities, management decided that garbage collection was more important than street cleaning. They thought that people who paid rates and garbage

tariffs every month would be more upset if their garbage was not collected, than if the streets were not swept. In Johannesburg and Sol Plaatje, every household paid a garbage tariff. The municipality used this income to pay for garbage collection services and the landfill sites. Individual households did not pay directly for street cleaning. Johannesburg and Sol Plaatje municipalities paid for street cleaning out of their general rates account. This is one of the reasons why municipal and Pikitup managers told us that garbage collection was more important than street cleaning. They felt that people should get the service they paid for. Also, the municipalities wanted to use the money from the rates account for things other than street cleaning, so they wanted to cut down on the amount of money they spent on it.

Street cleaners hardest hit by staff shortages

In all three municipalities the street cleaning sections were hardest hit by the staff shortages. Staff numbers in garbage collection had been kept almost the same, even though there was a general shortage of staff. The street cleaning sections were very short of staff, but they were still expected to do the same amount of work as when there were more workers. Some men worked in street cleaning, but almost all the waste management women workers were street cleaners. So women were most affected by the staff shortage. Men who worked in street cleaning were affected in a special way – they were forced to change jobs. In the Sol Plaatje municipality and in Pikitup, many men street cleaners had been permanently moved to collection so that this job was done properly. At Pikitup, if loaders were absent from work, men were also taken from street cleaning to help out.

In Sol Plaatje, the entrepreneurs took an even more extreme approach. They felt they were not being paid enough to do street sweeping and litter picking, so they broke their contracts and stopped providing these services. Women workers were most affected because they had only been employed to do street cleaning. When we did our research, there were almost no women employed by the entrepreneurs. Almost all had either been dismissed, or were not replaced when they resigned.

Changes in organisation: women suffer most

With privatisation, there were big changes in street cleaning in the Sol Plaatje municipality, in Thabazimbi, and in Pikitup in Johannesburg. Work was organised in a new way to make up for staff shortages. Some men did work in street cleaning. But because almost all women worked in street cleaning, it was women who suffered the most because of the staff shortages.

In all three municipalities many workers reported that since privatisation they were forced to work alone, and that fewer workers had to cover larger areas. In both Pikitup and in the Sol Plaatje waste management department, workers no longer worked in the same areas each week. They were sent wherever they were needed. This was stressful for them. They felt less safe in new areas. It also meant they had very little control over their work.

Women make up for bad waste management services

Because of the staff shortage in street cleaning, dirt was piling up in the streets of the suburbs, townships and business areas. In Thabazimbi, the municipality stepped in and used its own workers to make up for the poor job being done by the private company. It also depended on women township residents, including women waste management workers, sweeping the streets in front of their houses each day (for free). In Johannesburg and Sol Plaatje, the municipality and private companies also benefited from women's free labour in this way. There were also volunteer groupings and poverty alleviation projects that helped keep the townships clean, at no cost to the municipalities. In Johannesburg, city improvement districts helped the municipality for free in the wealthy suburbs and business districts.

Volunteers do municipality's work

Wealthy people in the former white suburbs sometimes held one- or two-day clean-up campaigns – mostly of parks and rivers. Volunteers in the townships, however were a more serious force in waste management in both Johannesburg and Sol Plaatje. Councillors organised on-going volunteers to do street cleaning. Volunteers worked five days a week, for years on end, doing the municipality's work for no pay at all. They did not receive any uniforms, and sometimes did not even receive equipment. They hoped that this would help them get a permanent job. But all they got were promises. Both men and women were involved in these volunteer groups, but the majority by far were women.

Poverty alleviation projects helped out

The Northern Cape and Gauteng provincial governments both had poverty alleviation projects that hired unemployed township residents to clean the streets. These workers did exactly the same job as municipal and private company workers. In Johannesburg they actually reported to the Pikitup depot and were supervised by Pikitup workers, but they were paid far less than municipal and Pikitup workers. In Sol Plaatje they were paid R31 a day, and in Johannesburg R40 a day to clean the townships' streets. In both municipalities the workers received a uniform, but because these were poverty alleviation projects, workers were not protected by all of the country's labour laws. This is because the minister had used the powers given to him by the BCEA to create special conditions of work for poverty alleviation projects. The jobs did not last long. The workers on these projects received lower wages and benefits than municipal workers. In Johannesburg they received higher wages and better protective clothing than many of the workers employed by the private companies! This showed how poorly the private companies were treating their workers. The majority of the poverty alleviation project workers were women. However, there was a much higher percentage of men hired in the poverty alleviation projects than in the volunteer activities.

The wealthy do it their own way

Johannesburg's wealthy residents and business people had come up with their own plan to keep their streets clean and attract shoppers. They set up city improvement districts (CIDs). Businesses all chipped in and employed workers to sweep the streets in the CIDs. They received higher wages, better benefits and uniforms than the workers from the private companies that Pikitup contracted to do street cleaning work. Almost all of the CID workers were men, and they wore uniforms that made them look like security guards.

Comparing workers' conditions

The volunteer campaigns, poverty alleviation projects and CIDs were all doing the same thing. They were helping the municipality and the private companies by cleaning the streets for them. However, our research found that the workers employed by the CIDs had much better wages, protective clothing and equipment, job security and benefits than the workers in the poverty alleviation projects and the volunteer campaigns. The CIDs only existed in the business areas and wealthy suburbs. The on-going volunteer campaigns and poverty alleviation projects only happened in the townships. So, if you were a worker in one of these initiatives in Johannesburg it was much better to work in the wealthy areas than in the townships. We also found that as the wages and conditions improved, more men were involved. Women were mostly stuck with jobs in the townships that paid lower, and in the case of volunteers, no wages.



Robbing women of paid jobs

Women who sweep in the street outside their yard every day, volunteers, workers on poverty alleviation projects and CID workers all do an important job – but they are doing the municipality's work. If they stopped, the municipality and the private companies that it contracts to do work for it would probably be forced to hire more workers. This would create more waste management jobs. Street cleaning is the only work that women get hired for in waste management. So if more paid jobs were created, women would benefit. The volunteer campaigns, poverty alleviation projects and CIDs were not in women's long-term interests. They took away women workers' chances of getting secure, paid jobs in the waste management sector.

Conclusion

Our three case studies showed that the quality of services suffered when waste management services were privatised, and when municipalities and private companies focused on cutting costs and making a profit. Private companies made profits, but black workers paid the price for it. They were paid lower wages, received fewer benefits, and had bigger and harder workloads.

Wealthy and working-class areas did not receive the same quality of service – apartheid still existed.

Because of the gender division of labour in the household, the community, and the workplace, black women workers carried an even heavier burden than the men. The same was true for women in black working-class communities.

It need not, and should not be this way. Municipalities in South Africa have a duty to provide good quality waste management services. They also have a constitutional duty to promote gender equity. We found that privatisation did the opposite. Instead of privatising, municipalities could choose to provide waste management services themselves, and use this as a way to promote gender equity. If municipalities made sure that townships received good waste management services, women would have less unpaid work to do. They would be able to join men in having more free time to do other things.

Municipalities could also take responsibility for spearheading new ways of seeing women and work. They have the power to break down the gender division of labour in the waste management sector by offering women stable and secure jobs outside of the traditional role of sweeping. Surely it is about time for municipalities to stop dumping on women, and provide waste management services in a way that eases their burden at home and at work, and helps to create gender equity. ○

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