C40 Pathway Towards Zero Waste

As mayors of the world's greatest cities, we recognise that bold action now to improve municipal solid waste management, setting a path towards a future without waste, is key to making our cities cleaner, healthier, more resilient and inclusive. As cities in the Global South, we have a unique opportunity to lead the way Towards Zero Waste.

Our rapidly growing and developing cities are facing the consequences of old economic models of linear production and disposable consumption, with our residents and environment bearing the costs.

We are generating waste faster than we can manage, leading to operational challenges like uncollected waste and overflowing landfills. Such challenges can lead to illegal open burning practices, burdening our communities with polluted water and air, and to clogged sewers, leading to disease-spreading flooding. Social marginalisation follows with informal waste collectors driven to salvage recyclables in often dangerous situations without decent working conditions.

While cheap products flood our markets and streets, and the oil and the plastic recycling industry fluctuate to the disadvantage of the recycling economy, taking steps to invigorate local reuse and recycling capacity is a viable path forward to achieve our goals.

In addition, food waste is a valuable resource that often goes lost in dumpsites and landfills, instead of generating compost, nutrients and energy. Mismanagement of food waste comes at a considerable financial and environmental cost in the form of pollution of the soil and underground water, and methane emissions, which is a powerful climate pollutant and a fire hazard.

The latest IPCC Report highlights that reducing methane emissions now is the fastest way to tackle global warming, due to its powerful near-term impact. In Global South cities, waste is a large contributor to municipal emissions, and in some regions can represent up to 35% of municipal overall emissions, primarily from methane generated at dumpsites and landfills. In our cities, the majority of collected waste is organic, and C40 Global South cities alone generate over 2 million tonnes of methane per year.

Tackling both food waste and methane is critical to our climate goals. One kilogram of food waste dumped has the same global warming potential as burning one litre of gasoline, with methane's contribution to global warming being 87 times higher than CO2 in the near term[1].

By reducing the disposal of food waste and improving waste operations and infrastructure, our cities can lead a historical opportunity to make significant contributions to avoid the worst impacts of climate change for this generation and deliver local benefits to our communities. As city leaders, we are the best equipped actors to reduce methane from waste management.

[1] Over the first 20 years after its release

Waste management is one of the primary services that city governments provide to make our cities clean, livable, competitive, resilient and equitable. Implementing inclusive and climate-friendly waste management practices will require transformational action in our municipal budget structures, bringing green and equitable opportunities to a skilled workforce that has historically operated on the margins of municipal systems, and recognising the benefits of organics' recovery for the climate, health, food and water security, economic opportunity and soil restoration.

By delivering on the pillars of the Pathway Towards Zero Waste, cities will be implementing the foundational activities in line with the Towards Zero Waste Accelerator, saving resources, protecting our local environment, creating good quality green jobs, building resilience, reducing emissions and promoting a sense of community.

By 2030, we commit to making our cities cleaner, healthier, more resilient and inclusive, by:

1. **Providing timely, city-wide waste collection**
2. **Treating at least 30% of organic waste**
3. **Reducing our waste disposal emissions by at least 30%**

To achieve these goals, we will transform the way we approach waste management in our cities by delivering the following types of activities by 2030:

- Make our cities cleaner and more resilient, especially for frontline communities, by addressing **waste collection gaps, reducing urban flooding and disease vectors and improving local air quality, with timely universal waste collection.**

- If one is not in operation, take the enabling steps towards the **development of a sanitary landfill with landfill gas capture**

- Make our cities more inclusive and equitable by creating new and better quality jobs, and opportunities locally within **the informal sector, by providing the needed infrastructure and developing sustainable nutrients recovery and recycling systems, with city-wide 3 stream (organic, recyclables, residual waste) segregation.**

- Make our cities healthier, by improving waste management and beginning the **phasing out of organic waste disposal, recovering nutrients and mitigating emissions from disposal sites** with at least 30% of organic waste diverted for treatment, generating compost, energy or other byproducts by 2030.

- Put our cities on the pathway to a waste--free society, by creating opportunities for innovative solutions and driving regional leadership, including **restricting single use items or phasing out particular non-recyclable materials.**

Participating cities commit to publicly report annually on progress towards achieving the goals of the pathway.