

Turning Waste to Wealth: A Solid Waste Collectors' Worker Cooperative Run by Youth – From USAID CLEAR Program

Kigro Recyclers

Kigro Recyclers, a waste management and recycling enterprise based in Nairobi Kenya was formed in 2019 as a self-help group to tackle the growing problem of garbage collection in their neighborhoods. The group has since established as a worker cooperative managed and owned by informal waste collectors, most of whom are youth. Kigro has 20 members who are also owners of the cooperative enterprise.

Garbage collection has always been a hard job especially in Nairobi County that produces around 2,400 tons of waste every day (NEMA, 2015). There are also several private sector waste operators who work independently and operate without laws and regulations and have monopolized the business to eliminate competition and sector growth. Through their cooperative, Kigro collectively addresses day-to-day issues that include occupational safety and health for members.

Our work is practical, so we train members on how to load, sort out waste and market the business to new clients. We also train new members on the cooperative business model' Alex Kariuki, Treasurer, Kigro Recyclers.

Initially, Kigro only focused on waste collection but now the cooperative has diversified its member benefits to also provide community education on sanitation.

'We pay workers every day, most of them have families and cannot rely on a monthly salary so many of them get a daily wage'. Rogers Rombe- Chairman



By organizing themselves into a worker cooperative, Kigro benefits from advantages such as access to markets and employment opportunities.

Decision making within the cooperative is a collaborative effort. The board makes transportation and logistics decisions and determines where waste will be dumped since it is the cooperative's policy not to dump waste at illegal sites. Members make decisions on opportunities for marketing and partnerships. The operational costs of running the business are covered by the cooperative including payment of workers.

From its collection points, the waste is transported to its assembling center where it is sorted, weighed and some of it baled for sale while the other is transported to the legal dumping site. Initially, members used a hand cart to transport waste, however through their cooperative's savings, they were able to buy a truck to meet the challenge of transporting large volumes of waste.

Global Communities helped us discover the worker cooperative business model and through Gender Equity and Good Governance trainings, we have realigned our business strategy and we are in a far much better place today, said Rogers.