PR02 / Community-Driven Governance and Climate Resilience: Building Agency of Waste Pickers in Urban Waste Economy

Topic : Practice

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Below is a clean, submission-ready 300–500 word section written exactly in the format requested: General Objectives, Research Questions and Scientific Relevance.
(Word count ? 420)

General Objectives, Research Questions and Scientific Relevance
This panel aims to examine how community-driven governance models led by waste picker organisations can enhance the inclusiveness, resilience, and adaptive capacity of urban waste management systems in the Global South. Rooted in over a decade of field experience from Hasiru Dala and the Alliance of Indian Waste Pickers (AIW), the panel seeks to build a deeper understanding of how informal waste workers develop collective agency, negotiate institutional recognition, and shape governance processes amid rapid environmental and economic change. The objective is twofold: (1) to document and analyse real-world models that integrate labour rights, climate resilience, and circular economy goals, and (2) to generate insights that inform policy coherence and institutional design for equitable urban transitions.

The panel is guided by the following research questions:

How do community-driven governance models enhance the participation and protection of waste pickers in urban solid waste management systems?

Critically looking at the examples of waste picker agencies built over time.
What are the policy and legal enablements and constraints experienced in integrating waste pickers in the formal governance system?

In what ways have climate adaptation efforts, such as flood management and occupational health improvements, been effectively incorporated into waste picker interventions?

What practical insights have emerged from grassroots-led initiatives that offer scalable, sustainable, and just urban waste solutions?

How can collaborative partnerships between informal workers, local governments, corporates and civil society improve the adaptive capacity of urban governance systems for future climate challenges?

Examine the market economy in the informal waste sector compared to the formal economy.

Scientific Relevance:
This panel advances scholarship on public policy praxis in the Global South by foregrounding informal labour as a central analytical category for understanding governance, climate resilience, and sustainability transitions. While much of the existing literature on urban waste management focuses on technological solutions or municipal systems, fewer studies systematically examine how informal worker-led governance models reshape institutional arrangements and environmental outcomes. By bringing empirical evidence from city- and community-level interventions—ranging from decentralised waste management to climate vulnerability responses—the panel contributes to a more grounded understanding of how governance coherence can be built from below.

The panel also responds to an urgent research gap: the need to bridge labour rights, climate adaptation, and policy design within informal economies. Field-based insights from waste picker organisations offer a

unique lens into how marginalised workers negotiate power, build resilience, and influence policy trajectories. The scientific relevance extends beyond India, providing comparative lessons for cities across the Global South seeking adaptive, inclusive, and socially just governance strategies in the face of escalating climate and economic pressures.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The panel is grounded in empirical experiences from Indian cities where informal waste pickers have built federations, negotiated municipal contracts, and co-developed governance systems that respond to both environmental and socio-economic vulnerabilities. These interventions occur within a context of climate stresses—flooding, extreme heat, and pollution—coupled with evolving policy regimes around Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), decentralised waste management, and social protection. This context is particularly significant because it highlights how climate resilience and labour rights intersect within informal economies, offering replicable insights to other Global South cities navigating similar governance challenges.

Papers Expected:
- The panel welcomes empirical, theoretical, and methodological papers that examine:

community-driven governance models
- Informal labour and climate resilience
- Urban policy coherence and institutional design
- Circular economy transitions led by informal actors
- Comparative analyses of market structures in waste economies