

The Pandemic Impact To The Waste Sector Workers in Surabaya



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- TONO (46)

Surabaya (East Java, Indonesia) is one of the cities worst affected by COVID-19, leading to severe challenges for the local economy. Informal sector waste workers have been affected particularly strongly. Such hardship has been experienced by Suhartono's family (46) who reside in the Penjaringan Sari area. Previously, the father of four and his wife Netty (40) collected waste at the Kangean waste depot that they sold to waste aggregators.

The pandemic has severely impacted this stream of revenue and the financial security of the family. Waste prices have dropped dramatically, and aggregators have reduced the amount of processed waste as their operations are also affected by the crisis.

"Before the pandemic, in one week I could sell two loads of collected waste per week. Now I can only sell one." explained Suhartono.

Netty added that "Before Corona I got IDR 200,000 for each load, now the price changes frequently - sometimes IDR 100,000 sometimes IDR 120,000." The current pandemic is disrupting many livelihoods in similar ways, and forcing informal waste workers to look for alternative sources of income.

Lamidi (66) picks up waste from households in villages on Krembangan Bhakti street. His income depends on the amount of waste he collects. Before physical distancing restrictions were implemented he covered 10 villages generating an income of 1,500,000 IDR per month. "My friends and I had to follow the stay at home order, especially because I belong to a vulnerable population group due to my age," Lamidi explained. He has since survived by relying on his savings and food donations.

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"Luckily there are still good people who want to share their fortune. So my family and I can still survive. Hopefully after the end of the end of physical distancing restrictions everything can gradually recover and the virus leaves."

But informal waste workers are not the only ones to feel the pain of the crisis. Yuda (37) is formally employed by the Surabaya Central Waste Bank (BSIS) and has been temporarily laid off as his employer is suffering from reduced demand from recycling factories. Yuda and his wife have turned to selling frozen food and packaging products online to make ends meet for them and their two children. "My family has a lot of needs. One is still a toddler, and the other one wants to go to kindergarten that I have to pay for," Yuda explained.





Joko Sulilo (35), another formal waste worker employed as cleaner by the Surabaya municipality is still continuing his duties. He also acts as the coordinator for a temporary waste collection point in the Kangean area. He sees the cleanliness of the city as an integral part of the response to COVID-19: "In my opinion, environmental cleanliness must be maintained. If cleaning staff like me stay at home the disease would spread even faster. Maybe other diseases would spread too."

Therefore, being sufficiently protected is critical for workers like Joko. However, he and his colleagues still use improvised protective equipment. Even though his economic situation has not been impacted by the crisis, he hopes for circumstances to change soon. "I would feel much safer without the threat of the virus and it would be much easier to collect waste from households."

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In addition to economic impacts, waste workers are at a particularly high risk of infection, as they are in direct contact with household and industrial waste from various sources. The safety of waste workers is therefore an important issue not only during the current pandemic, but also in the long term. Supplying personal protective, and hygiene equipment, as well as education and awareness raising about the dangers of being exposed to waste and the required behaviours to reduce risk are highly needed.