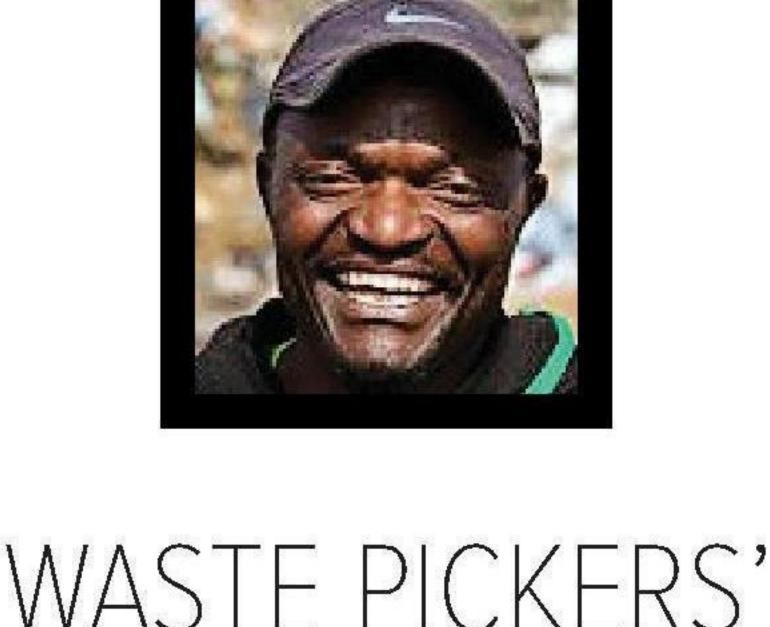
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COMMENT



STRUGGLE FUK RECOGNITION SIMON MBATA YESTERDAY was International World

Waste Pickers Day. On March 1, the SA Waste Pickers Association (Sawpa), and

millions of waste pickers globally rec-

ognise their struggles across the world.

We remember March 1 as the day

workers fighting for the right to a decent life and work, paid with their lives. On March 1, 1992, 11 waste pickers were brutally killed in Columbia, igniting the spark of resistance in waste pickers across the world, and the need to fight for recognition and respect. Waste pickers existed before indus-

alisation for reuse, repair and recycling to earn a living. Sawpa was formed to promote, protect and defend the rights of waste

trialisation. For years, waste pickers

found themselves picking up the dis-

carded products produced by industri-

pickers. When groundWork, our partner, challenged the failure of the government to manage waste dump sites across the country, it found many people working in the spaces, picking

recyclable materials, selling them and

Waste pickers, the government

earning an honest living.

said, were not allowed to be there and it often used violent means to push waste pickers from their place of work. But waste pickers took the

risk anyway to support themselves

and their families, and, in the process,

contribute positively towards effective

waste management in municipalities.

Waste pickers working on dump

sites and in streets were looking for a voice to represent them, their interests and well-being. GroundWork's waste campaign paved the way for waste pickers to organise in South Africa. In Parliament in 2007, when SA's first democratic waste legislation was being developed, the Environment Department called for a ban of waste

pickers from dump sites. Waste pickers

and groundWork went to Parliament

to resist the move that would've taken

away people's livelihoods and resulted

in the privatisation of their space. Consequently, pickers were recognised as legitimate stakeholders in municipal waste-management systems. In 2009, waste pickers from across the country formed Sawpa. From its birth, Sawpa built alliances with other organisations nationally and internationally. GroundWork,

Friends of the Earth International,

Women in Informal Employment Glo-

balising and Organising, and Global

Alliance for Incinerator Alternative

local and national level for recognition

of waste pickers as stakeholders in

waste management. This resulted in

guidelines to integrate waste pickers

Sawpa has engaged government at

became the main partners.

into waste-management systems for all municipalities. Industries are also required to consult and engage with waste pickers when drafting industry waste management plans. Over the past 12 years, Sawpa has stopped two waste-to-energy projects proposals in South Africa. It also assisted many waste pickers to organise into structures like Roms in Preto-

ria, African Reclaimers Organisation

in Johannesburg and Metsimaholo

Recycling Forum in Sasolburg to be

pickers play an important role in

Research has shown that waste

supported and funded.

waste management, and in the recycling economy, alleviating poverty and mitigating emissions. We are yet to see meaningful support towards waste pickers by the government or private sector. Policies at local level are not favourable towards waste pickers and their work. Private sector support always focuses on profit making. Waste pickers and other environmentalists have been calling for a new approach and a system that doesn't see

waste at all. A revolution – zero waste. It is the only approach that values the environment and the people who manage society's waste. The coronavirus has shown the world needs to change how we manage and dispose of waste. As waste pickers, we are calling for zero-waste programmes in all municipalities and separation of waste into organic and inorganic to be mandatory. We are also calling for waste pickers to be compensated by municipalities for their service, and for manufacturers and producers to compensate waste pickers for recovery and recycling of their products. A luta continua!

the SA Waste Pickers Association

resale or retransmission.

Mbata is the national co-ordinator of