



# The inclusion of the informal sector in the Oum Azza Landfill: the Attawafouk cooperative

The creation and organisation of a cooperative of informal workers to manage a sorting platform and sell the sorted materials on the site of a sanitary landfill.

## EXPECTED OBJECTIVES

When the landfilling site of Akreuch, that used to treat the waste generated in the Rabat agglomeration, was closed down and replaced by the new sanitary landfill of Oum Azza, a cooperative was created to secure the activity and improve the working conditions of about 150 informal workers who were scavenging waste in Arkeuch. The cooperative was organised by a local NGO commissioned by the company in charge of the operation of the new landfill. This project had several objectives:

- Improve the working conditions of the informal workers;
- Formalise their activities and secure their revenues;
- Increase the sorted quantities sent to re-use and recycling.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND LOCATION

### General information on waste management:

- Collected quantities of municipal waste: 429 kg/cap/yr
- Main fractions: organic waste (63.7%), paper and cardboard (16.5%), plastic (7.8%)

### General information on the territory:

- Location: agglomeration of Rabat
- Country: Morocco
- Population of the urban area: 2 million inhabitants
- Density: 200 inh./km<sup>2</sup>

### General information on the Oum Azza site

- Surface: 110 ha
- Capacity of the landfill: 850,000 t/yr
- Capacity of the garden waste composting unit: 80,000 t/yr
- Capacity of the mechanical-biological sorting centre: 215,000 t/yr
- Quantities sent to recycling: 5,000 t/yr
- Quantities of RDF sent to energy recovery: 90,000 t/yr

## KEY INFORMATION

- **Topic:** recycling
- **Waste fraction:** municipal waste, paper and packaging waste, biowaste
- **Target group:** informal sector
- **Instruments:** infrastructure, social inclusion

## DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION

Since 2010.

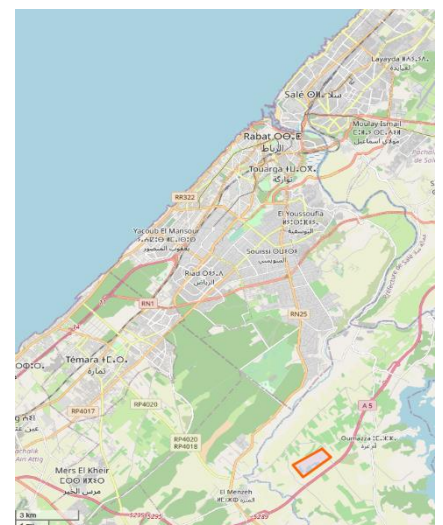


Figure 1: location of the Oum Azza landfill (source: OpenStreetMap)



## IMPLEMENTING BODIES

The creation of the cooperative was part of the new agreement signed between the 13 communes of the Rabat agglomeration and the waste operator of the new landfill, Teodem. The practical organisation was commissioned by Teodem to an international NGO, CARE. The waste sorters were closely associated in the creation and management of the cooperative.

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED

The cooperative relies on the collaboration of diverse local stakeholders: the international NGO, CARE; the operator of the Oum azza site, Teodem; the 13 communes of the region (including Rabat, Salé, Témara and Skhirate), the ministerial department in charge of the environment, the Office of Development and Cooperation and the informal reclaimers.

The governance of the project took shape with the creation of a steering committee that held numerous meetings. They brought together many stakeholders from the region and enabled them to express themselves democratically on the actions to be taken. In order to enable informal waste pickers to better integrate into the labour market, a support and training programme has been set up by the international NGO, CARE. This mainly involved technical and skills training in the field of waste.

## GENERAL CONTEXT

Following a request from the 13 municipalities and the Ministry of the Interior and the closure of the previous landfilling site of Akreuch, where about 150 informal waste sorters were scavenging recyclable waste, the company Teodem, in charge of the management of the transfer station and the new landfilling site of Oum Azza, hired an NGO to identify and coordinate the informal waste sorters that used to sort waste on the landfilling site.

The creation of the cooperative was part of the new agreement signed between the 13 communes of the Rabat agglomeration and the waste operator of the new landfill, signed in 2007. The objective was to secure the source of income for the informal workers, to improve their working conditions, and to formalise their role in the waste management system. The working conditions at the previous landfilling sites were very challenging, with extreme competition to collect valuable materials, lack of protective equipment, etc.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITIES

The mission commissioned by the waste operator to CARE led to the creation of a cooperative called Attawafouk, that managed a sorting platform and sells the sorted materials (plastic, glass, and metal) to recyclers.

The first steps consisted in the analysis of the different possibilities for organising and mutualising the work of informal waste sorters (association, cooperative, etc.), and the drafting of a legal document to establish the cooperative (status, rules, registration procedure, etc.). In parallel, an information session directed to the informal workers were organised to highlight the benefits of such a cooperative. The identification of informal waste sorters and pickers was based on a study done within the framework on the EU project GODEM (<http://www.medcities.org/-/other-projects-godem>) that also studied the possible implementation of a sorting centre on the new landfilling site. The cooperative was created in 2010, and about 150 waste sorters joined at first.

The sorting of waste is performed on a sorting centre treating waste entering the landfilling site. The sorting centre consists in a first step extracting the organic matter, followed by a manual sorting line where waste sorters extract key fractions.



The cooperative aims at improving the working conditions of waste sorters, but also at increasing the quantities sent to re-use and recycling, and reducing the waste sent to landfilling. Members of the cooperative were exclusively waste sorters from the old landfill. The whole process relied on the involvement and active participation of the workers, and one of them took the position of president of the cooperative. The cooperative's activities focus on waste sorting, sales of sorted materials, and awareness raising. Besides, it promotes occupational integration and has integrated about 200 waste sorters, including 27 women.

The cooperative was organised around several key principles:

- A participative governance, with steering committees meeting on various occasions, so that the action plans could be discussed and co-elaborated;
- A training process set by the NGO CARE to contribute to the occupational integration of workers, provide a professional training on waste management, and assistance and individual interviews for tackling any other social issue (mobility, health, etc.).
- The spirit of cooperation promoted through group work;
- Gender equality with equal pay for female and male workers.

Besides waste sorting, the cooperative is also involved in awareness raising activities and participates in communication campaigns and events targeting the general public.

The sorting centre was improved in 2016 and its capacity was doubled.

## FINANCING AND COST RECOVERY CONTEXT:

The cooperative could mobilise various sources of incomes thanks to the collaborative approach with different stakeholders. Besides the sales of sorted materials, the cooperative took advantage of different subsidies and support, e.g. for investments (made by Teodem and the local authority), and the training sessions provided by CARE. Incomes are re-invested, the cooperative being a non-profit organisation.

Investment costs amounted to about MAD 6 million (including the construction of a second sorting line on the Oum Azza landfill site, which increased the sorting capacity of the Attawafouk cooperative from 400 tonnes/day to 1,000 tonnes/day).

Efforts were concentrated during the first five years to achieve financial stability of the cooperative, especially in light of the budget deficit that the cooperative experienced during the first 3 years due to the global financial crisis, the lack of resources and the weakness of capital, which did not exceed 16,700 MAD.

As a result of a series of measures, the cooperative managed to achieve a budget surplus during 2015. As a result, this surplus began to be invested in strengthening the mechanisms and means of work, which had a positive impact on the number of annual transactions: it increased from MAD 3.8 million in 2012 to 5.6 million in 2016, and to MAD 6.1 million in 2017.

## MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS AND RESULTS:

The example of Attawafouk shows how a transition can be operated from an informal system to a formal organisation of waste sorting, while including the waste sorters in the process. About 200 waste sorters are now working at the cooperative, enabling the recovery of about 5,000 tonnes of recyclable waste each year. Overall, the key results are the following:

- **Social inclusion:**
  - The project guaranteed the access to employment for excluded people (200 waste pickers integrated with regular jobs, including 27 women);
  - The project led to the creation of the job of "sorting operator", which gives a social status to the previously informal workers;
  - Professional training is also organised, with several "sorting operators" trained as team leaders;
  - Improvement of working conditions: safety, hygiene, social security.



- **Environmental impact:**

- The ATTAWAFOUK cooperative manages to extract more than 5,000 tonnes of recoverable materials each year: about 1,800 tonnes of plastic per year, including 1,320 tonnes of PET, about 500 tonnes of metal packaging (including 300 tonnes of steel cans and 60 tonnes of aluminium cans), 1,200 tonnes of cardboard and 500 tonnes of paper.
- Besides, sorting residues are sent to the LAFARGE HOLCIM group as RDF, representing about 90,000 tonnes per year sent to energy recovery;
- Each year, 80,000 tonnes of green waste are used in composting after their recovery. These different sorted quantities lead to a decreased of landfilled quantities.

The cooperative brought economic stability to the sorting activity and to the participants, who can now benefit from bank accounts and possibilities to get loans and access to property.

The actions also addressed other issues, such as child labour (the informal system encouraging school drop-out), or the social integration of the workers (reflected by a drop of manifestation of delinquency and the fact that most of the unmarried staff have married in the last two years).

## KEY FACTORS OF SUCCESS

The success of this action depends on several factors:

- The inclusion of a social clause in the contract of the landfill operator, making the integration of waste sorters mandatory, and the inclusion of the cooperative on the landfilling site;
- The collaboration of the different local stakeholders that enabled a concerted approach and opened the door to various sources of funding;
- The status given to the cooperative and the active involvement of waste sorters in the design, organisation, and management of the sorting centre.

## BOTTLENECKS, LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The cooperative is a way for waste pickers to enhance the value of the recycling sector and make an important contribution to sustainable development. However, there are still several obstacles to overcome in the future, including:

- The cooperative cannot benefit from credit at a low rate, as long as it is counted as an enterprise by the banks;
- The illiteracy of many of the cooperative workers, and the increasing age of the waste pickers (men and women) prevents their dynamism and subsequently the growth of the cooperative;
- The cooperative is working in an increasingly competitive market, and it needs regular monitoring, incentives and subsidies from public funding. It also heavily depends on Teodem's strategical choices that has a priority right for buying the sorted materials.
- Working conditions need to be further increased, as the lack of source separation entails the presence of potentially hazardous waste (e.g. medical waste).
- The economic balance is fragile, and the cooperative was severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis that prevented sorters from working and stopped the activity of buyers of sorted materials.



## LESSONS LEARNED AND REPLICABILITY

This experience shows that it is possible to improve the working conditions of waste pickers, along with the environmental performances of the waste management system, as long as the informal workers are actively involved, and all key stakeholders of waste management (waste authorities, waste companies, etc.) engage in collaborative work. This example seems replicable in other contexts, yet it seems important to highlight that this project benefited from different resources to perform well and reach financial stability:

- Financial support and subsidies from the waste company and the municipalities, especially to invest in the sorting facility;
- Training sessions provided by CARE directed to the waste pickers.

To achieve financial stability, the sorting capacity had to be sufficiently increased to ensure a proper source of incomes from sorted materials.

## CONTACTS

<https://fr-fr.facebook.com/cooperative.attawafouk>

## REFERENCES, LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

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