



COLOMBIA

FUNDES — A recycling network to bolster the vulnerable



More information on un.org

Picking waste for recyclables is an income source for many at the bottom of Colombia's economy. Lacking the conditions to coordinate across the recycling supply chain, waste pickers work under informal and inefficient conditions for meagre earnings.

With the project 'Reciclamos Juntos', the Julius Baer Foundation supports FUNDES Catalyst in connecting waste pickers with waste generators and recycling plants to form an inclusive, mutually beneficial supply chain. The parties are trained in separation,

collection, quality control and business management of recyclables. The coordinated collaboration professionalises waste picking and increases its efficiency and profitability. The project also educates communities about recycling, and forges alliances with the public and private sector to make recyclers visible and integrated.

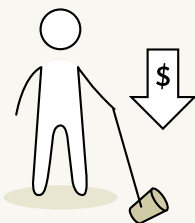
By connecting and incentivising stakeholders in the recycling value chain to work together, the project increases the amount of recycled material, catalyses the circular economy, and promotes the social mobility of waste pickers alongside the development of their professional associations.

Quick facts

- Colombia, Bolívar Department, Cartagena
- Project support: 2020–2025
- Grant amount: CHF 300,000 per year
- The project is co-funded by Fondation Botnar
- Linking informal waste pickers with waste generators, collection centers and upcycling companies in a well-integrated recycling supply chain.
- Goal: Building a safe, profitable and collaborative recycling network to tackle wealth inequality and grant waste pickers dignity and safer prospects.

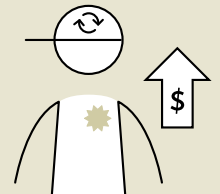
From an informal waste picker ...

Even though waste pickers are carrying out hard work, they make a low, unreliable income and endure a low social status.



... to a professional recycler.

Fully trained, equipped and part of a formal and coordinated recycling association, waste pickers become recycling professionals with an up to 40% higher income and increased social mobility.





“Before, I didn’t see recycling as a way of working. Now I am looking forward to doing this job and making the recycling centre grow. [...] we can offer training to our recyclers and get young people involved. Recycling is not something you are born knowing, you learn it. We are not garbage collectors, we are recyclers.”

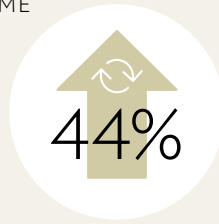
Miguel Canencia, age 36,
Manager of a Recycling Center

OUTPUT



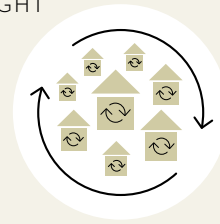
600 waste pickers from vulnerable social groups received training and tools to become professional recyclers.

OUTCOME



Waste pickers increased their collection of valuable recyclables **by 44%**, which are sold at market prices and represent an important source of income.

HIGHLIGHT



320 waste generators – from small shops to larger enterprises – are forming **a network of eco-friendly businesses**, incentivised to sort their waste by credits disbursed as a block-chain community currency.

A collaborative and mutually beneficial ecosystem

- Only 11% of materials are recycled in Cartagena, causing both environmental damage and a huge loss in economic value.
- The existing recycling value chain is inefficient because its actors – waste generators, waste pickers, and recycling centres – are not incentivised to work together.
- FUNDES Catalyst organises and professionalises local waste pickers with training and equipment, establishing recycling routes that maximise their yields.
- Waste pickers experience greater social mobility as they gain access to new opportunities for themselves and their families through enhanced income, resources, and skills.
- The project also partners with waste generators and provides training on how to properly separate recyclable materials.
- Recycling centres are trained in quality control and business management, improving the retention rate of their workers.
- Educational programmes with local schools sensitise citizens to the local recycling efforts and teach young people environmentally responsible behaviours.

About FUNDES Catalyst

FUNDES Catalyst is the venture studio for people to thrive, not just survive. It teams up with change-making entrepreneurs to launch impact ventures that solve Latin America’s real problems by empowering micro and small businesses. Provided with tech solutions, the small businesses can unleash their potential to transform the local economy by creating jobs, livelihoods and equal opportunities for all.



More information about FUNDES and their project in Colombia:
fundes.org/fundes-catalyst



Watch the FUNDES video

Do you feel inspired by the FUNDES project and would like to support it?

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us! We would love an exchange.



Find out more about us and our projects online or write us at foundation@juliusbaer.com

Julius Baer Foundation

Established in 1965 by Walter J. Bär (1895–1970), the grant Foundation of Bank Julius Baer is focused on reducing wealth inequality. It convenes leading thinkers and actors on the topic and supports projects around the globe where the privileged and disadvantaged work together towards a world of equal opportunities.

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