



COLOMBIA

Fundamental — A recycling network to bolster the vulnerable



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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 impact venture Trófica, the Julius Baer Foundation supports Fundamental in connecting waste pickers with waste generators, recycling plants and buyers to create an inclusive supply chain. Trófica's capacity-building methodology equips informal

recyclers and recycling centres with technical, commercial and leadership skills, while microloans for working capital and transport help expand collection, boosting sales and earnings. This strengthens Cartagena's recycling economy.

The venture also educates communities about recycling and forges public-private alliances to link recyclers to logistical and financial resources needed to grow their business. By connecting and incentivising stakeholders in the recycling value chain, Trófica increases recycled material, drives the circular economy and promotes waste pickers' social mobility and professional growth.

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 centres and upcycling companies in a well-integrated recycling supply chain.
- Goal: Build a safe, profitable and collaborative recycling network to tackle wealth inequality and grant waste pickers dignity and safer prospects.

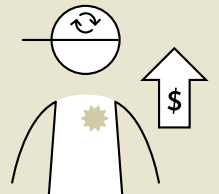
From an informal waste picker ...

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 100% 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.”

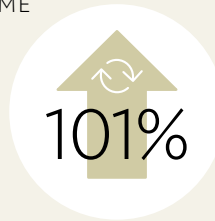
Miguel Canencia, age 36,
Manager of a Recycling Centre

OUTPUT



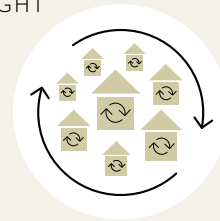
710 waste pickers from vulnerable social groups received training and tools to become professional recyclers.

OUTCOME



Waste pickers increased their volume collection of valuable re-cyclables **by 101%**, which are sold at market prices and represent an important source of income.

HIGHLIGHT



414 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.
- Fundamental organises and professionalises local waste pickers with training, equipment and microloans, 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 venture 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 Fundamental

Fundamental 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 business and tech solutions, informal workers, micro and small businesses can unleash their potential to transform the local economy by creating jobs, livelihoods and equal opportunities for all.



More information about Fundamental and their impact ventures in Latin America: fundamental.lat



Watch the project video

Do you feel inspired by this Fundamental venture and would like to support it?

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with us! foundation@juliusbaer.com



Learn more about our mission and our projects on the Wealth Inequality Initiative platform.

Julius Baer Foundation

Established in 1965 by Walter J. Bär (1895–1970), the Julius Baer Foundation has a long history of supporting diverse philanthropic initiatives. Today, our focus is on reducing wealth inequality by convening leading thinkers and actors on the topic and supporting projects worldwide that foster collaboration between individuals, groups and organisations across the wealth spectrum to create a world of equal opportunities.

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