

**GARBAGE PICKING AS A STRATEGY FOR SURVIVAL:
A CASE STUDY OF A SUB-SECTOR OF THE INFORMAL SECTOR.**

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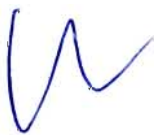
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PREFACE

This thesis is based on research conducted on garbage dumps in Durban from October 1985 to December 1985 under the supervision of Professor Jill Nattrass of the Development Studies Unit at the University of Natal in Durban.

This study represents original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another University. Where use has been made of the work of others it has been duly acknowledged in the text.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'W' or 'M' shape with a small flourish at the end.

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This study is the product of two years of intensive research on garbage picking and the informal sector. Without the assistance and support of many people, this study would not have been possible.

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Any errors or inaccuracies in this study remain strictly my own.

ABSTRACT

In the past few years there has been a dramatic increase in research dealing with the informal sector in South Africa. This research is often motivated by academic curiosity as well as a growing concern over poverty and unemployment among South Africa's blacks. It has increasingly been suggested by academics, businessmen and government officials that the informal sector be developed and encouraged in appropriate directions in order to provide employment opportunities.

This thesis is a case study of a group of people who are officially unemployed, and who work in the informal sector in order to survive. The economic activity they are involved with, represents a subsector of the informal sector namely, garbage picking.

The first question that is addressed in the study deals with the problems inherent in the conceptualisation of the informal sector. There are many interpretations of what comprises this sector, depending in part on the stage of development that has been reached by the local economy and on the theoretical perspective used in the analysis. There are also many perspectives on whether the sector is independent and autonomous and on the extent to which it is intergrated into the economy of a country. Chapters 1 and 2 contain critical examination of the literature dealing with these aspects.

In chapter 3 the characteristics of the informal sector are studied. Several case studies from different parts of the world are examined.

Chapter 4 examines the marginality concept in relation to the garbage pickers with a view to determining the extent to which these people are marginalised in society.

Attention is then directed towards the particular case study. The characteristics of garbage picking and the people who do this work, as well as the conditions under which they work, are examined in chapters 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 of the thesis.

The results show that there is very little potential for the garbage picker to improve his/her position within the informal sector. The garbage pickers regard formal sector employment as their only way out of their present position and, given present circumstances, it seems that their view is correct.

However, since the likelihood of their finding formal wage employment seems very limited, alternatives were examined and it seems that within the garbage industry the potential does exist to create formal sector jobs for the pickers. This potential can, however, only be realised once the garbage industry recognises this and re-organise itself to employ these people on a permanent basis.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of people living off garbage dumps is found world wide and is likely to become even more prominent as the urbanisation process continues, especially in the developing world where urbanisation rates greatly exceed the rate of job creation.

It is conservatively estimated that South Africa will have an urban population of 24 055 000 by the year 2000 (which is 44 percent of the present total population) (Cilliers & Groenewald, 1982: 37). With such rapid growth rates in the urban workforce and the generally slowing pace of the urban economy, the question must arise as to how all these people will live. Formal sector employment levels are certainly unlikely to increase sufficiently to offer work to all those who need it. In the absence of an adequate safety net in the form of unemployment benefits, it is certain that significant numbers of the urban dwellers will be forced to seek some other survival strategy.

It is often argued that the informal sector in the towns fills this role (Nattrass, W.J. 1984; Wellings & Sutcliffe, 1984). However, empirical studies of the informal sector show that even here there are limitations on entry into certain sectors such as commerce and construction and that, consequently, the really destitute have very limited options even in the informal sector (Nattrass & Glass, 1986). Garbage picking is one area in which, from an economic point of view,

because the initial investment in terms of both human and capital skills is low, entry is relatively open. This openness, coupled with the unattractive working conditions and the relatively low rates of return, on both capital and labour (which discourage entrance into the sector by those who can do better) means that it is an activity which, like that of street trading, can be used as a survival strategy.

✓ Even though garbage picking is common and relatively widespread very little is known about either the economics of the process or the characteristics of the people themselves.

"From what little has been written about these people, and it is indeed little, it is clear that most observers have been strongly of the attitude that garbage pickers are a hopelessly poverty-stricken group who are scratching out a meagre existence from the crumbs of the richer man's table" (Birkbeck, 1979: 161).

✓ It is generally accepted, without any real empirical foundation, that garbage pickers are poor, and are forced to pick because they cannot find employment elsewhere. It is also suspected that the pickers sell their collections, and form part of the informal sector.

The purpose of this study is to examine the work done by the garbage picker in Durban's metropolitan area, and to find out where and how

the picker fits into the socio-economic hierarchy, as well as to obtain information relating to the nature of the role, if any, he/she plays in the economy. An attempt will be made to determine just how well a person can live from picking garbage and whether it is indeed a viable alternative strategy for survival.

This study can, therefore, be regarded as a micro-study of the informal sector and in this respect should also help to further the understanding of the overall economic role played by the informal sector in the economy.

CHAPTER 2

TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE INFORMAL SECTOR

2.1 Introduction

During the last few decades the developing countries have experienced an unprecedented rate of urban growth. The natural rate of population growth in these countries is very high, and this, together with the tendency for the rural population to migrate to the urban areas, has meant that the rate of urban growth has been much greater than the overall rate of population increase. This, in turn, has meant that the demand for work in the urban areas has been greater than the supply. Not enough jobs were created, and relatively few people were absorbed in the urban productive labour force. The result was an increase in poverty, unemployment and underemployment in the rapidly growing towns.

Since the Second World War much has occurred in the development of economic models concerned with explaining the Third World problems of employment and poverty. The most significant being, as far as this study is concerned, the development of the formal/informal sector dichotomy. In order to examine the above, it is important to look at the historical developments leading up to the use and adoption of these terms.

After the Second World War the 'accelerated growth' model dominated thinking in development planning in the Third World. This model was aimed at promoting economic growth through industrialisation. It was thought that if Gross National Product could be maximised, then one would have a 'trickle down' effect leading to the alleviation of poverty and unemployment. Industrial expansion was supposed to lead to increased wage-sector employment. Social aspects such as, rapid urbanisation, unemployment, squatter settlements and related problems, were seen as temporary in nature (Harrod, 1939; Domar, 1946 and Moser, 1978).

By about the mid-1960's it was realised that this was not the case. Concern about poverty and unemployment as well as political crises in the Third World became predominant. By 1964 the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Employment Policy Convention (No 122) promoted the adoption of employment creation policies by governments. In 1969 the World Employment Programme of the ILO was initiated. The aims were to analyse employment problems and to come up with strategies to solve them. A series of country studies was first launched and was followed later by a series of urban studies. The objectives of these studies were to examine poverty and unemployment and their causes in these areas, and to make policy recommendations to the various governments (International Labour Organisation, 1972).

These recommendations emphasised employment and urged governments to adopt active employment creation policies with accompanying recommendations urging the establishment of employment targets,

indicating the policies to be followed and proposing both bilateral and international co-operation (International Labour Organisation, 1972 in Moser; 1978).

A significant result of the ILO policy recommendations was the redefinition of unemployment and the emphasis placed on the productive role of the informal sector, as well as the adoption of a positive attitude towards its promotion. An important contribution made was the contention that the employment problem could not be seen in isolation, but that employment strategies could only be made sensibly within an overall development strategy. Unfortunately this did not happen because simultaneously a target group approach to policy recommendations evolved. The idea was to generate employment within particular sectors, thus disregarding their position within the overall structure (Moser, 1978:105).

The ILO studies policy recommendations were criticised by Leys, among others, for being too Utopian. The ILO, in effect, demanded structural and institutional changes that would be very difficult to achieve without major political changes, which was not an ILO goal (Leys, 1975). The ILO studies were also criticised for emphasising major policy objectives aimed specifically at the unemployment problem, rather than at economic growth per se. Yet they contradicted themselves by emphasising rapid Gross National Product growth as an essential policy requirement. These policy recommendations did not differ fundamentally from those of the 'accelerated growth' model.

2. 2. The Informal Sector: Origins and Definition

2.2.1 The Origin of the Concept

X A shift in focus from the promotion of Gross National Product to one of employment creation took place. Through the emphasis that was placed on employment, the urban poor became the target group for specific attention (ILO, 1972). It was found that often no provision for unemployment benefits or other forms of social security existed in many Third World countries. Consequently, the unemployed had to find some alternative way to survive. This was often done through employment in small scale enterprises or other very small scale economic activities that have come to be referred to as the informal sector.

The counterpart to the informal sector is the formal sector and is taken to comprise the government and its related activities, multi-national companies, other large wage employing enterprises and those small enterprises which have formal institutional links with either big business or government.

The informal sector concept was first introduced by Keith Hart in 1971, at a conference on Urban Employment in Africa, held at the Institute of Development Studies, (IDS), at the University of Sussex and again in 1972 in Kenya at the ILO Country Employment Mission

Conference. These conference discussions served as a springboard for the informal sector concept. The reason why this conference served as such a powerful springboard for the concept, and why the concept itself enjoyed so much popularity and controversy was, according to Bromley, that it provided the rationale for a development strategy which the mainstream international development community wished to recommend to Third World countries. Bromley argued:

"the informal sector concept was adopted because ...it embodied policy implications which were convenient for international organizations and politically middle-of-the-road governments. Support of the informal sector appeared to offer the possibility of 'helping the poor without any major threat to the rich', a potential compromise between pressures for the redistribution of income and wealth and the desire for stability on the part of economic and political elites" (Bromley, 1978b: 1036).

2.2.2 The Definition of the Informal Sector

It is very difficult to define the "informal sector" accurately since, to quote Moser, there exists;

"complete confusion about what is actually meant by the Informal Sector. For instance it has at different times been regarded as synonymous with the urban poor, or with people living in slums or squatter settlements, or with the immigrant population of cities. In addition certain kinds of occupations have been treated as belonging to the informal sector, while at times those concerned with housing tended to regard the development of the informal sector as synonymous with the improvement of housing in the informal areas" (Moser, 1978; 1051-1052).

Most conceptualisations of the informal sector however, share an emphasis on economic dualism - in other words, the economy consists of two separate sectors, a more traditional and a modern sector.

2.2.3 Conceptual Approaches to the Theory of the Informal Sector

The major conceptions of the informal sector fall into two schools, the Reform and the Radical or Marxist approaches. These two schools are well established and tend to dominate opinion regarding the informal sector. The major differences between the schools arise from their perceptions of the nature of the links that exist between the informal sector and the state, and those existing between the sector and rest of the economy, in particular the larger business sector (Nattrass, J., D. Krige and N.J. Nattrass, 1986: 11).

2.2.3.1 The Reform Approach

This approach towards the informal sector originated in the economic reform movement which arose as a response to the failure of accelerated growth strategies. A new approach was required, a reform approach which would accept poverty and unemployment as structural features not likely to disappear with growth, but which could still be overcome within the prevailing socio-economic and political framework. The ILO missions and the Sussex conference in 1971 must be seen from this perspective (Nattrass, N.J., 1984a).

Hart investigated and emphasised the role that self employment played in countering the effects of capitalism in developing countries. Hart identified new income generating activities within the informal sector. He distinguished between wage earnings and self employment, and defined the informal sector to include all people who were self employed (Hart, 1973). However, as Davies points out, this

"precludes the possibility of workers being employed by informal sector operators, and is not therefore an adequate basis for analysing the sector. Furthermore, it does not provide criteria by which the self-employed in the formal sector can be distinguished from those in the informal sector" (Davies, 1979:88).

Hart also identified several characteristics which are typical of the informal sector. The ILO mission report adopted and extended these characteristics, thus enabling the identification of the target groups. These characteristics have become generally accepted, though they are often regarded as inadequate. According to ILO theorists;

"Informal activities are ways of doing things characterised by:



- a) ease of entry
- b) reliance on indigenous resources
- c) family ownership of enterprises
- d) small scale of operation
- e) labour intensive and adapted technology
- f) skills acquired outside the formal school system
- g) unregulated and competitive markets.

Informal sector activities are largely ignored, rarely supported, often regulated and sometimes discouraged by the government. The characteristics of the formal sector activities are the obverse of these, namely:

- a) difficult entry
- b) frequent reliance on overseas resources
- c) corporate ownership

- d) large scale of operation
- e) capital intensive and imported technology
- f) formally acquired skills often expatriate, and
- g) protected markets, through tariffs, quotas, and trade licences" (International Labour Organisation, 1982:67).

By categorising the two sectors into two separate groups each with its specific characteristics, the identification and isolation of the target groups become easier. However, as Bromley points out, this approach led to the classification of all economic activities into two definite categories, causing a great lack of clarity as to what else exists apart from these two sectors and how to classify anything that does not fit into the definition. "A division into a larger number of categories ...(or the use of a continuum,) would give each category considerably more internal coherence" (Bromley, 1978b:1034).¹

Also, as Gerry points out, such analysis;

"avoids any discussion of the economic structure
as a whole and the conditions underlying the

1. According to Sethuraman the use of a continuum is also problematic because it is often assumed that if a division exists it is arbitrary and that "if there is a dichotomy at all, it is because the so-called informal sector enterprises are still in the process of transition and it is only a matter of time before the discontinuities disappear" (Sethuraman, 1976:73, as quoted in N. Nattrass, 1984a:6).

relations between characteristically different production processes co-existing in the urban national and international economy. Thus the reality of urban non-industrial production in underdeveloped countries is obscured either by dualist misconceptions or romanticized fantasy, or both" (Gerry, 1978:1149).

Gerry strongly criticised all attempts to isolate and define the informal sector. Most writers and researchers in the field recognise the various differentiating characteristics, but Gerry contends that;

"the pre-occupation with characterisation and the refining of definitions causes these studies to neglect the relations between the different systems or sub-systems of production, which determine the phenomena that characterise a specific productive system and the foundations for the functioning of the whole" (Gerry in Sethuraman, 1976:72).

Mazumdar and others at the World Bank differed in their approach to the formal/ informal dichotomy: they looked at the informal sector in terms of the division within the urban labour market. Mazumdar describes the informal sector as being "unprotected" as against the formal or 'protected' sector. He describes his dualist concept as

follows:

"The basic distribution between the two sectors turns on the idea that employment in the formal sector is in some senses protected so that the wage-level and working conditions in the sector are not available, in general, to the job seekers in the market, unless they manage to cross the barrier of entry. This kind of protection may arise from the action of trade unions, of governments, or of both acting together" (Mazumdar, 1981:1).

Like Mazumdar, Weeks also stressed the factors external to the two sectors in defining them. He argued that the difference between the two sectors was determined by their relationship with the state. Formal sector enterprises, including government, were protected in the sense that competition was restricted, thus reducing risks and uncertainty. Protective measures include import tax rebates, tax holidays, low interest rates and so forth. The informal sector is in a disadvantaged position in the sense that it does not enjoy the same access to economic resources or the protection that the formal sector does (Weeks, 1973b).

Another approach to the informal sector is that of the so called 'Structuralists'. They feel that the informal sector characteristics

are not inherently part of the sector, but that they are determined by the sector's structural position within the economic system, and by whether it has access to economic resources or not. They also see the informal sector as being closely integrated into the rest of the urban economy. The inherent assumption in their analysis that the links between the two sectors were benign or neutral and complementary to one another, places the structuralists within the reform perspective. These links were conceptualised as benign on the grounds that most of the "exports" from the informal sector were services, commerce and domestic, which complement formal production. As a result, the potential for growth and accumulation within the sector was seen to be enhanced by its access through these trade flows to the expanding markets of the rest of the economy (Tokman, 1978).

The advantage of the structuralist view was that, because it emphasised the links between the formal economy and the informal sector, it enabled one to analyse questions regarding the growth generating ability of the informal sector, as well as the relationship between the formal and informal sectors.

Structuralists often try to influence and guide policy proposals aimed at promoting the informal sector on the assumption that "an improved policy environment will shift resources towards the informal sector, allowing it to absorb the increasing labour force at higher levels of productivity" (Tokman, 1978:1066). Amongst the proposals that have been made to promote the informal sector are the promotion of subcontracting between the informal sector and formal

sector, the provision of training programmes for informal sector operators, the subsidising of informal sector inputs and the provision of loans to informal sector operators (Sethuraman, 1977; Du Toit, 1981).

The structuralists assumed that with aid, recognition and policy redirection, the informal sector enterprises would develop into formal sector ones (Bromley, 1978b:1034). However, Davies argued that by defining the informal sector in terms of its characteristics and the question as to whether it enjoys government support or not, analysts in this school only;

"defines the dominant attitude towards the sector, but does not help us to understand anything about how the sector operates or relates to the formal sector" (Davies, 1979:88).

Following this line, it seems that structural guidelines for policy making may well fail. However, it has also been argued that;

"Despite the problems associated with the structuralised theories, they must be regarded as the strongest in terms of academic criteria and the most influential when it comes to guiding policy" (Nattrass, N.J., 1984a:9).

The theoretical approaches to the informal sector discussed so far, can be broadly classified as reformist because they postulate that poverty and unemployment can be alleviated with the correct application of policy measures within the existing socio-economic and political frameworks, thus implying that poverty and unemployment are caused in some way by internal conditions within the informal sector activities themselves such as a lack of capital, lack of skill, poor management etc, rather than by conditions inherent in the operation of the economic system itself.

2.2.3.2 The Marxist or Radical Approach.

During the 1960's conventional approaches to development theory as a whole came under significant attack and a broad body of thought now generally known as "dependency theory" developed. The present Neo-Marxist approach to the 'informal sector' (or to the 'petty commodity producers') developed from those dependency theories, which dealt with the way in which the Third World societies were incorporated into the international capitalist system and how this led to 'peripheral capitalism' (Wallerstein, 1973).

Dependency theory provides a much broader structural perspective to the problems of development in the Third World as a whole and the

Marxist approach to the informal sector enables a better understanding of the dynamics involved in the relationship between the formal and informal sectors than do theories which simply identify characteristics of the sectors.

The Marxist theories differ from the reformist approach in that they look at Third World poverty and unemployment from a much wider perspective. They focus on the economic relationships between the First and Third World as well as on those between the capitalist and pre-capitalist forms of production within the Third World social formation. They also look at the interaction between these variables. In other words, they look at both external and internal conditions causing poverty and unemployment.

Essentially, radical development theorists argue that the relationships between the advanced countries and the Third World are such that capitalism never fully develops in the latter and their economies are characterised by what has been called "peripheral capitalism" (Amin, 1974).

Peripheral capitalism, according to McGee, involves a capitalist sector deeply integrated into the international capitalist economy and a variety of petty capitalist forms of production in which the articulation of the relationships between these two sectors is primarily a response to the pace of expansion of the dominant capitalist sector (McGee, 1979b:50).

The characteristics of peripheral capitalism are:

- "1) a combination of capitalist and petty capitalist forms of production under the hegemony of the first form,
- 2) a combination of these two forms in which one is grafted onto another and which is characterised by capitalist expansion which occurs in a series of leaps rather than entirely domestic evolution" (Quijano-Obregon, 1974:394).

Peripheral capitalism had its origins during the colonial period, during which time rural subsistence producers were drawn into the developing industrial sectors. A shift from producing mainly subsistence goods to the production of consumer goods or commodities took place. This new type of production evolved in order to meet and fulfil the requirements and interest of the more favoured strata of the LDC's (less developed country) population, and also indirectly those of the foreign capital. for trading profits and foreign exchange.

"The thrust of the colonial state was, therefore, to supervise the initial and necessary penetration of pre-capitalist formations, to

organize the conditions of exploitation, labour and land" (Bernstein, 1977:61).

In other words, through the penetration of the indigenous economy by colonial capital, this economic system was undermined and subordinated. This was done in various ways - land was alienated and appropriated for the production of agricultural and mineral commodities, on estates run by settlers or capitalist companies, and in mines established by productive capital of varying size and degrees of concentration. These forms of production required a continuous supply of labour, making the state's intervention crucial in order to establish the necessary labour reserves (Bernstein, 1977: 62).

According to Bernstein, the critical moment in the penetration of the natural economy by capital is the breaking of the cycle of reproduction in the natural economy, which is accomplished through the initial monetization of some of its elements and the consequent interaction between the two modes of production. One or more of the following were the methods used to effect this:

1. the introduction of taxes - necessitating sources of cash income
2. the use of corvee labour in public works (to create an infrastructure to support the movement of commodities) and in farms organised by the state, missions, or private

capital

3. forced cultivation of particular cash crops (Bernstein, 1977: 62).

As a result of these processes, some of the producers became separated from the means of production and were proletarianised. However, simultaneously, another relationship which did not involve the total separation between the producer and the means of production, called peasant commodity production, emerged in most Third World countries. This form of production was different, however, from either traditional or true capitalist production in that it was subordinated to, integrated into, and existed only at the margins of the economy (Le Brun and Gerry, 1975:20).

In order to explain the interaction between the capitalist mode of production and the petty commodity form of production, Bettelheim introduced the theory of a dual process of 'conservation-dissolution', which means

"that within a capitalist social formation the non-capitalist forms of production, before they disappear, are restructured (partly dissolved) and thus subordinated to the predominant capitalist relationship (and so conserved)" (Bettelheim, 1972:297).

In other words, petty capitalism, instead of being destroyed by the penetration of capitalism, is conserved in such a way that it operates within the limits set by capitalism and becomes increasingly dependent on the capitalist sector for its raw materials and means of production.

The above is a definite departure from Marx's analysis of petty commodity production. Marx defined the petty commodity production sector as a transitory phase between capitalist forms of production and, in the case of less developed countries, the inherent form of production present. Marx believed that the petty commodity form of production would eventually be destroyed by the penetration of capitalism;

"Wherever it takes root, capitalist production destroys all forms of commodity production which is based either on the self-employment of producers or merely on the sale of the excess product as commodities...Capitalist production first makes the production of commodities general and then, by degrees transforms all commodity production into capitalist production" (Marx, 1972:36).

Petty commodity production was a transitional form in the development of capitalism in Industrial Europe, yet according to Moser and others, this is not the case in the Third World countries as;

"... considerable modification and redefinition in the light of the experience in contemporary underdeveloped capitalist urban economies where there is little indication that the widescale proliferation of petty commodity production is losing momentum" (Moser, 1978:1057).

In other words, the dissolution process operated during the transition to a self sufficient capitalist mode of production in Europe, whereas in the Third World today it is the conservation aspect which dominates.

"This means that one should conceptualise Third World petty commodity production as restructured for functional purposes, rather than as a transitional mode between non-capitalist and capitalist modes of production" (Nattrass, N.J., 1984a:13).

Why did the demise of petty commodity production not occur in LDC's? Why is it that the petty commodity production sector continued to survive, despite capitalist penetration? Understanding of these questions might provide the key to understanding the dynamics of the

informal sector in the LDC's.

Petty commodity production continues to survive, because the sector is functional to the development of capitalism in LDC's (Davies, 1979). The petty commodity producers provide cheaper goods and services to the urban working class, the unemployed and the poor, thus enabling these people to keep their costs of living down. By these means the capitalist sector is able to keep wages low, and the state is freed from the necessity of providing social security. The petty commodity producers are also seen as a reserve army of labour for the capitalist sector.

"In other words one should conceptualise Third World petty commodity production as being restructured for functional purposes, rather than as a transitional mode between non-capitalist and capitalist modes of production" (Nattrass, N.J., 1984a : 13).

Gerry and Birkbeck felt that even though the petty commodity production sectors have features which might lead to growth in the sector,

"there are extremely potent forces which retard any growth strategy which might evolve within this

part of the urban economy, resulting out of the dominant position held therein by the capitalist mode of production. The avenues of expansion and capital accumulation, available to petty commodity producers are largely determined by the extent to which capitalism has established its hegemony over the principal production processes in the economy" (Gerry and Birkbeck, 1981:133).

Analysts supporting a Marxist or Radical approach argue that the 'informal sector' or petty commodity production sector should be examined from a broad perspective, inclusive of the historical development of capitalism as well as of the whole world economy. They feel that in order to stimulate the growth of Third World economies and, specifically the petty commodity sector, developers have to look at the way the sector or economy is integrated into the international economic sphere and not just at 'superficial' symptoms. Many theorists of this school of thought conclude that only revolutionary (and often even violent) change can improve the situation of the poor in Third World countries (Moser, 1978: 1062).

2.3. Evaluation of Reformist and Marxist Approaches

As Nattrass, Krige and N.J. Nattrass point out;

"The fundamental differences between the two major

schools of thought arise from differences in their perceptions of the nature of the relationship between the sector and the state and of the linkages that exist between the very small business sector and the remainder of the economy, particularly the larger business sector" (Nattrass, J., Krige and N.J. Nattrass, 1986:11).

The reformist approach sees the nature of the relationship as being benign, whereas the Marxist approach regards it as being essentially exploitative. These opposing views lead to opposite sets of policy measures, with the reformists advocating the development of closer links between the two sectors through the use of such things as subcontracting and credit arrangements, and the Marxist school advocating the cutting of the links between the petty commodity producers and the formal capitalist enterprises (Moser, 1978:1062).

N. Nattrass has argued that an approach which focused on the structural linkages and relationships between different production and distribution systems, rather than on categorizing and describing the two sectors, would have a greater explanatory power (Nattrass, N.J., 1984a). Moser similarly, argued that the Marxist approach - through its identification of the constraints on the expansion of small scale enterprises, the levels of capital accumulation and the dynamics of production, as well as the transitional process of capital production or proletarianisation - is better able to focus on

the structural linkages between different levels of production and on the potential for modifying these linkages (Moser, 1978:1061).

In respect of policy formation, Moser stated;

"The importance of the petty commodity approach is not that it condemns the informal sector concept, or state and international agency measures to promote informal sector development, but that it puts them in their correct perspective by showing that in themselves they cannot really provide solutions to the problems of unemployment and poverty. Because of the dependant relationships between large scale capitalism and petty commodity production, policy solutions designed to assist the latter, almost invariably end up by promoting the former. Ultimately only fundamental changes in the overall political and economic structure can change this" (Moser, 1978:1062).

The reform approach focuses on the characterisation of the informal sector but does not really explain why the sector exists, how it functions within the urban economy, or the role it plays in the economic structure of the country, nor how it enables the urban poor to survive. Neither does this approach explain or clarify the links which exist between the two sectors and without these explanations, it

is virtually impossible to develop any useful framework for subsequent policy development.

The Marxist approach also has its shortcomings. Marxists tend to generalise in respect of the sector, and they contend that all petty commodity producers are either poor, marginalised or desperate to survive (this being the only way in which they can cope). To Marxists the petty commodity production sector becomes a collective term including all very small commodity producers. However, empirical evidence from studies of the sector show very clearly that not all members of the informal sector are desperate, and marginalised. Indeed, in some sense, nor are they all petty commodity producers (Nattrass, N.J., 1984a).

As the terms "informal sector" and "economy", were increasingly used by analysts and planners, the lack of precision in the concept became increasingly clear. As more research was undertaken on the sector, more and more attributes were added to the informal sector, providing a more detailed description thereof. Yet, no single, informal enterprise shared all the characteristics, nor even did one single criterion emerge with sufficient frequency to be able to form an adequate base for classification. It becomes obvious that neither one of the two approaches were able to give a complete explanation or picture of the informal sector. The informal sector clearly has elements emanating from both schools of thought. Yet, still, neither approach seems able to recognise this, nor to make an allowance for an alternative viewpoint. It is thus clear that another theory/approach

which incorporates relevant elements from both approaches is needed.

2.4. Alternative Approaches

A number of attempts have been made to formulate alternative approaches to the informal sector. One such approach has been made by Bromley and Gerry. They approached the problem from the viewpoint of labour and argued that it is not realistic to see work-situations in terms of two poles, i.e. within the informal or the formal sector, but rather, that one should look at it as forming a continuum of work situations, ranging from casual work through stable wage work to true self-employment. This would then enable the recognition and analysis of many different forms of employment located between the two poles.

The term casual work is used by them to include any way of making a living which lacks a moderate degree of security of income and employment. This includes everything considered as an income opportunity such as, self-employment and working for others, in both legal and illegal activities.

Casual work is divided into four categories:

- 1) Short term wage-work. This is paid and contracted by the day, week, month, etc. No assurance of continuity of employment is given. These short term wage workers do not enjoy the benefits usually associated with long term wage

work.

- 2) Disguised wage-work. This is when a person regularly sells his/her product or parts of it to a firm or groups of firms, without being actually employed by the firm. These workers usually define their own working hours and as such experience a feeling of independence.
- 3) Dependent work. The worker is dependent on large enterprises for credit, rental of premises or equipment, supply of raw materials, or an outlet for his/her production.
- 4) True self-employment. The worker is independent and obtains an income without engaging in any of the mentioned three categories. The worker is the owner of his means of production. He/she works independently from any specific firm.

Mobility between working relationships and income opportunities is common and recognised by Bromley and Gerry. The people who do casual work are termed the 'casual poor' by Bromley and Gerry. The term describes the dominant characteristics of a large part of the labour force, focusing upon poverty, insecurity, and exploitative interlinkages with other groups in society (Bromley and Gerry, 1979:14).

This approach by Bromley and Gerry has merit in that it is an attempt to include a wide range of activities. They recognise that a simple distinction between wage and self-employment is not adequate and that it does not encompass all activities which can be classified as informal.

Another school of thought or approach regarding the informal sector has also recently emerged. This approach is a combination of the Reformist and Marxist schools, since it is argued that both schools contain some elements of the 'truth', and that if they were combined, they would complement one another. Like the reform school, the approach is concerned with the potential for growth of the informal sector and, as such, identifies the enterprises or small businesses with this potential for growth. However, like the radical analysts, it also recognises and identifies the factors which constrain the growth of these enterprises. These constraints are recognised as being both internal and external to the enterprise. For example, a lack of entrepreneurial skills would be a constraint internal to the enterprise, whereas the structural limits on the financial markets in a capitalist economy that lead to a lack of capital and the ability to obtain it, is external to the enterprise (Nattrass, J., Krige and Nattrass, N.J., 1986 and House, 1984).

2.5 Conclusion

Analysts in this school accept that the nature of capitalism, itself,

provides a significant constraint on the development of the informal sector. They do not accept the corollary that no informal enterprises at all can grow. Instead, they argue that the challenge to policy makers is to identify those enterprises that can grow and the constraints at present limiting them.

Many LDC's are burdened with starvation, economic and political crisis, to mention only a few problems. The informal sector has some potential to alleviate the conditions the LDC populations live under. This sector can provide a means of survival for those who are otherwise unemployed, and can help to promote economic growth overall, provided that the sector is, itself, encouraged to grow and to develop, and is not stunted by government regulations. This inherent growth potential in the sector has managed to grasp the imagination of many organisations, policymakers and academics. Unfortunately much confusion exists as to the precise definition of the sector, due to a lack of co-operation between scholars of the different schools and approaches and this had made the identification of the policy target groups difficult and has, in some cases, led to unrealistic expectations of the performance of the sector.

Research on the informal sector has shown that informal sector enterprises do not all share the same characteristics nor has a single criterion emerged to form an adequate basis for classification, making more detailed studies of the sector an important prerequisite if we are to reach a better understanding and definition of the sector.

The informal sector is not an autonomous sector on its own and should be regarded as part of a country's economy. Studies on this sector should look at the characteristics of the sector, the linkages between the informal and the formal sector, as well as the dynamics operating within the sector, itself. As a result of the growing quantity of empirical research that is being done world wide on this sector, a body of detailed knowledge about the informal sector and the dynamics within it is emerging (see for example Fapohunda, 1981; Fowler, 1981; Jacobs, 1982 and Jellinek, 1977).

This study, together with one by Krige on the informal sector in KwaMashu in Natal and one by Nattrass and Glass on informal black business in Natal, are attempts to add to this knowledge. They aim to gain more knowledge about the sector and, as such, to provide a building block for a better definition of the Informal Sector.

CHAPTER 3

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE INFORMAL SECTOR

3.1. Introduction

This chapter looks at the characteristics of the informal sector, and what other studies found in this regard. In the previous chapter it was seen that, whilst the informal sector is very difficult to define accurately, there is a real need for such a definition. It is, therefore, important to look at the findings of the studies done to date in respect of the sector's characteristics in order to determine how this knowledge could influence policy makers.

In order to make policy decisions regarding the development of the informal sector and its impact on the economy and society, it is necessary to establish a data profile to obtain a better understanding of the sector. Knowledge about the following is important ; Who works in the sector? Are they educated? Why do they work there? How large is it? What does the sector comprise of? The size of the businesses? Where are they situated? What limits their growth?

According to the ILO, the informal sector activities are characterised by:

- a) ease of entry

- b) reliance on indigenous resources
- c) family ownership of enterprise
- d) small scale of operation
- e) labour intensive and adapted technology
- f) skills acquired outside the formal school system
- g) unregulated and competitive markets (ILO, 1982)

These characteristics have become generally accepted, yet it is often felt that they are not all inclusive, and further, that they do not give a very representative account of the sector. In an attempt to obtain more precise information, this chapter will discuss the sector in terms of the following: the demographic characteristics of the workers in the sector, the employment generating ability of the sector, the income generating ability of the sector, the work history of the informal sector workers, their working environment and related problems. The data obtained from a number of case studies from various parts of the world as well as from South and Southern Africa will be discussed in terms of the above.

3.2. The Demography of Informal Sector Operators

Reviewing a number of studies on the sector, the International Labour Organisation concluded that:

- a) more men are employed in the sector than women

- b) women are involved in and dominate certain activities, for example, tailoring, food processing and domestic service
- c) the business proprietors are usually in the 30-40 year age group whilst their employees are younger
- d) most of the people in the sector have less than 6 years of formal education (ILO: 1982).

Since the publication of the ILO report, however, a considerable amount of further work has been done on the sector. Consequently, in the next section case studies from various parts of the world will be looked at in terms of these four characteristics in order to determine whether or not these generalisations can still be taken as representative of the sector as a whole.

3.2.1 Sex

- In a study by the Marga Institute in Colombo (Sri Lanka), (Marga Institute, 1981) it was found that eighty-eight percent of participants were male. And, in similar studies in Kano (Nigeria) (Labogunje and Filani, 1976:89); and in Jakarta (Sethuraman, 1981) only a small percentage were women (25 percent in the latter study).
- It would appear that indeed more men were employed in this sector. Yet, other studies showed that one could not generalise about the dominance of one sex or the other in the informal sector. In a study done by Teilhet-Waldorf and Waldorf in Bangkok, it was found that

sixty percent of those within the primary working age group were women (Teilhet-Waldorf and Waldorf, 1983;594). Similar findings were quoted by Mazumdar, Souza and Tokman, the latter for studies in Latin America (Mazumdar, 1981; Souza and Tokman, 1976).

— The contention of the International Labour Organisation that women tend to dominate certain activities is, however, borne out by several studies. In a study in Cordoba (Argentina) it was found that men were predominantly involved in manufacturing activities, in construction and in commercial activities requiring substantial capital input. Women, on the other hand were mainly involved in domestic services and retail trade. It was also found that women fell into the lower income groups, eighty-five percent of women belonged to the low income category as compared to thirty-nine percent of the men (Sanchez, et al 1981:145). Income appeared to be largely determined by the type of activity the worker was involved with and not by sex.

Interestingly Fowler found in Freetown (Sierra Leone), that thirteen percent of the men who participated in the study were tailors, an activity which, according to the ILO, was usually dominated by women (Fowler, 1981).

In Bogota Moser found that the sex divide positively correlated to the size of the enterprise.

"The majority of large- scale sellers were middle-aged men with medium-sized families. The small-scale sellers on the other hand were mostly women over fifty years old, single with illegitimate children, widowed or deserted, and sole supporters of small-sized families" (Moser, 1977:472).

In South Africa the sexual division in the informal sector appears to be similar. Nattrass found in two separate studies - one in the township of Katlehong near Germiston and the other among small businesses financed by the KwaZulu Finance Corporation - that men were predominant and that women were involved in specific activities, such as for example, clothing (Nattrass N.J., 1985).

- Studies in Clermont and Inanda, both near Durban, and in Windhoek showed no clear signs of either sex being dominant (Simon, 1984; Maasdorp, 1983; Nattrass & Glass, 1986). Yet, in a study in Mdantsane near East London it was found that the majority of businesses were run by women (78 percent) (Jacobs, 1982).

The ILO's findings regarding the tendency of women to be involved in and dominate specific activities can also be seen from South African studies. Rogerson and Beavon found that the informal sector in Soweto could be divided into three groups of activities; services, production and distribution. Activities grouped under services were

mostly operated by women, they included the "shebeen-queens" and child-minders. Under production women were involved in sewing, knitting, and crocheting. Distributive activities involving women were predominantly the retail sale of food and other hawking activities. Men tended to dominate the craft and artisanal categories (Simon, 1984; Nattrass, N.J., 1984b; Rogerson & Beavon, 1982; Nattrass and Glass, 1986).

Concl

It is clear from the above that, in general, both sexes are involved in the informal sector and that neither sex is dominant. However, in specific places or countries the opposite might be the case, but sex domination in the informal sector is, clearly, not a world wide phenomena. The evidence does, however, support the ILO's contention that the different sexes tend to concentrate on specific activities.

The fact that women were as equally involved in the informal sector as the men, means that the policy makers wishing to develop the sector, need to consider this. Nattrass feared that because women were generally discriminated against, they might find it even harder to obtain funds or subsidised premises. As women tended to predominate in certain sectors these might lag behind in the development of the sector as a whole. Women might also be forced into lower income occupations than their qualifications and capabilities warrant, since they would concentrate in activities which require little formal recognition in terms of funding, credit, and premises (Nattrass, Krige & Nattrass N.J., 1986:47).

3.2.2 Age

When looking at studies done on the the age distribution of the informal sector workers it became clear that nearly all age groups were represented, from children through to the very old. On the average, it appeared that the ILO's finding that the majority of enterprise heads were between the ages of 30 to 40, and that those employed were slightly younger, was true in most places.

- In Africa it appeared that the operators of informal businesses were younger than elsewhere; for example in Kumasi (Ghana) 72 percent were under 35 years of age (Sethuraman, 1977). Studies in some other countries found the following: the proportion of heads in the informal sector enterprises below 30 years was 38 percent in Colombo; in Freetown it was 38 percent for males and 30 percent for women; as compared with only 14 percent in Manila; 24 percent in Cordoba and 22 percent in Campinas (Sethuraman, 1981; Fowler, 1981 and Sanchez, et al 1981).
- Those working for others in the informal sector were generally younger than the operators of the informal enterprises/businesses. In Kano (Nigeria) 25 percent of those working in the Informal sector were between 15 and 20 years and 15 percent were under 14 years. (Sethuraman, 1977). In Cordoba the median age for workers were 38 years (Sanchez, et al 1981:145).

Fowler, found that in Freetown the 20 to 29 year age group was well represented in most informal activities; 57 percent of all footwear manufacturers fell in this age group; 43 percent of tailors; 48 percent of retail trade repairers; 28 percent of taxi owners and 53 percent of those in manual transport were all under 30 years old. (Fowler, 1981:51). As the worker grew older and gained in experience, skill and savings, more opportunities in the sector seemed to open up. This was also true for the women in Freetown where, with increasing age, more women became involved in activities that required skills, for example, dressmaking, food processing, etcetera (Fowler, 1981:51).

- Some studies showed a high degree of youth and even child participation. The Marga Institute found in Colombo that a quarter of the participants were under 24 years old (Margo Institute, 1981). In Kano (Nigeria) more than 15 percent of participants were under 14 years and in Cali (Colombia) 10 percent of street-traders were below 14 years of age (Sethuraman, 1977, and Bromley, 1978a).
- In South Africa more or less the same has been found. Jacobs in 1984 found that the mean age of workers in informal sector businesses in Mdantsane was 41 years (Jacobs, 1984). The mean age in Katlehong was found to be 32 years, and in Inanda 50 percent of the participants were under 38 years (Nattrass and Glass, 1984 and 1986). The younger age groups in Inanda found it difficult to enter the informal sector.

Only 7 percent of the sample were less than 25 years old, despite the fact that there was very high rates of unemployment amongst this age group (Nattrass and Glass, 1986).

Did these Inanda youths merely find it difficult to enter this sector? Were they prohibited from entering the sector because of lack of skills and capital or was it because they hoped to find better jobs and opportunities in the formal sector? Were there stigmas attached to work in this sector? Did they consciously choose not to work in this sector and to remain unemployed? Answers to these questions will have to be found if successful policy recommendations to develop the sector are to be made.

3.2.3 Education

Looking at the ILO's educational profile of the informal sector, one would expect to find that the majority of informal sector participants had less than 7 years of education (ILO, 1982). One would also expect high levels of illiteracy, as the educational levels reached in LDC's are generally lower than in the developed world.

The Marga Institute found in Colombo that, in terms of education, 10 percent of the participants were illiterate, 8 percent were literate without any formal education and 30 percent had less than 4 years of schooling. The median level of schooling in the Colombo sample was 4 years (Marga Institute, 1981). In the Freetown study, two-thirds of

the informal sector employees had never been to school, 12 percent were dropouts from primary school and 6 percent had not gone beyond primary school. Among entrepreneurs in the sector, 40 percent had no schooling at all and 45 percent had an informal education or did not complete primary schooling (Fowler, 1981). In Kumasi about 40 percent of the entrepreneurs had less than a primary education while 58 percent had received some secondary education (Sethuraman, 1977). In Kano 46 percent had only Arabic training, 12 percent had no education at all and of the remainder, nearly three-quarters had primary schooling (Mabogunje and Filani, 1981:84).

The Lagos study showed slightly higher levels of education in that, among entrepreneurs about three-quarters had had some formal education, 13 percent had had some informal education and only 11 percent had none. Of those who had had some formal education, 75 percent had 6 years or less of primary schooling, and the mean for entrepreneurs with formal schooling, was 5.89 years. It was interesting to note that Lagos had enjoyed free primary schooling since 1955 (Fapohunda, 1981:71).

In the Cordoba study it was found that the median level of education for entrepreneurs was 5 years; in a Campinas (Brazil) study it was found that only 2.5 percent of the heads of enterprises were illiterate and 40 percent had secondary education; in Cali 25 percent of the street traders had less than 3 years of formal education (Bromley, 1978a; Sanchez, et al 1981 and Berlink, Bovo, and Cintra,

in Sethuraman, 1981).

Southern African studies have also shown that the average level of education amongst informal sector participants is low. In Mdantsane, Jacobs found that 48 percent of those surveyed had no formal education (Jacobs, 1982). In the Windhoek study 32 percent had no education and 28 percent had full primary schooling (Simon, 1984).

The average educational level of informal business proprietors in Inanda (Durban) was also low; 20 percent had no formal education; 40 percent had not received enough to ensure literacy. In this study it was shown that there were differences in the educational profiles with respect to the various occupations. More than half of the operators in the hawking (58 percent), craft (69 percent), and artisan (50 percent) sectors had less than 5 years of education and were thus likely to be functionally illiterate. Only 25 percent of small shopkeepers had less than 5 years schooling, of those working in the other categories, 32 percent in sewing, 38 percent in knitting, 34 percent in building, and 27 percent in entertainment had reached the same level of education (Nattrass and Glass, 1986).

3.2.4 Skills and Training

In general, the level of skills in the informal sector is low:

"The majority of workers in the informal sector had no skills when they entered it; indeed, a substantial proportion entered activities which required virtually none" (Fowler, 1981: 346).

In the Freetown study 40 percent of the workers reported that they had no need to learn any skills (Sethuraman, 1977). In activities where they did need skills, most acquired it through on-the-job training within the sector. In the Kumasi study, for example, 90 percent reported that they had served their apprenticeship in the informal sector, 5 percent in a formal sector firm, and 3 percent in a training institution (Sethuraman, 1977).

On the other hand, Ghana was found to have a well organised apprenticeship system which provided access to skills at very little cost when compared to formal training. The owner of a small sector enterprise recruited youths with some schooling and then trained them on the job for a fee payable at the end of the apprenticeship. The trainee received a small sum while training, and the trainer or owner got additional labour quite cheaply. This kind of training is practically oriented and promotes self-employment (Sethuraman, 1981).

In South Africa there was little evidence that on-the-job training existed. Of the 245 business proprietors in the Inanda study, 55 percent said that they had had less than four weeks training for their

jobs. In the craft and building sectors 32 and 42 percent of the operators had more than two months training on the job (Nattrass and Glass, 1986:100).

The generally low levels of education found in the informal sector suggested that the sector absorbed people with relatively little education. Richardson maintained that there was little evidence that formal education was essential for success in informal sector employment (Richardson, 1984). Nattrass felt differently:

"it may well be that the low average levels of formal education are a major contributing factor to the high rate of failure found amongst small business" (Nattrass and Glass, 1986:112).

3.3 Income Levels

The opinion that the informal sector in developing countries provided very little income has been challenged by recent research (Richardson, 1984:14). It has been found that "...there is a wide diversity of earnings in the sector and within important components of it ..." (Mazumdar, 1976). Some sub-sectors of the informal sector, particularly those that require few skills or capital, did have very low incomes. These were often more visible and initially researchers tended to concentrate on them. However, the earnings of the small scale manufacturers and the maintenance and repair establishments'

income were comparable to those of small and very small formal businesses .

In a variety of studies, done in developing countries in Africa, Asia and South America it was found that a uniformly low level of income did not exist, incomes varied between the various subsectors. In Nairobi a wide variety of incomes was found, manufacturing being the most profitable economic sector and services the least. This disparity existed both between sectors as well as within them (House, 1984). A study in Brazil found similar findings "...the image of the small scale sector as that of the privileged, is questionable" (Schmitz, 1982).

Interesting findings were made in an informal sector study done in Bangkok; the daily earnings of informants were substantially higher than those for unskilled workers in the formal sector, both within the government and the private sectors. The daily earnings for unskilled men and women were generally the same among the vendors and 'brick people',¹ whereas the average wage rate for unskilled men were significantly higher in the construction, manufacturing and textile industries. Other studies done in Thailand confirmed this (Teilhet-Waldorf and Waldorf, 1983:595).

1. The term 'brick people' refers to those people who buy bricks from brick factories in the rural areas and transport them on their boats to the city where they sell these bricks.

Differences exist between the income of employer and employee in both the formal and the informal sectors. However, since the informal sector has been described as "... a system of very intense exploitation of labour, with very low wages and often very long hours" one might expect that the gap between the average earnings of the proprietors and the employees would be wider than that of the formal sector and the average wages and working conditions poorer (Leys, 1975).

It is no easy task estimating the incomes of informal workers. Most enterprises do not keep any record of income or expenditures. Many informal activities are operating illegally and, consequently, are reluctant to give accurate information. Some of these illegal activities are also often the most lucrative, and their conclusion makes it difficult to make estimations regarding income levels and inequality and about the general level of wealth generated by the sector.

In the case of South Africa, there were few sources of reliable data relating to the income earning capacity of informal businesses. What data there is suggests, from surveys undertaken, that;

1. On average income levels were low
2. Incomes varied with the occupational sub-sector
3. Incomes were very unequally distributed

4. It was not clear whether the incomes from small business operations were on average higher or lower than those offered by wage labour (Nattrass, et al 1986:60).

The above findings corresponded to those of informal sectors elsewhere.

As far as the determinants of informal sector profit earnings are concerned, very little data is available. In the Inanda study it was found that profit levels were positively related to the level of starting capital, the amount of additional capital introduced, the capital/labour ratio, the profit rate, the level of education reached by the proprietor, and the age of the enterprise. The number of competitors and employment levels were negatively related to income levels (Nattrass and Glass, 1986:115).

3.4 Employment Creation

"One of the most important issues in framing a policy towards the informal sector was the extent to which the sector is capable of providing employment and incomes, not just for the operators themselves but other individuals as well" (Maasdorp, 1982:158).

It is often thought that the informal sector could make invaluable contributions in employment creation especially in countries with an excess of unskilled labour. Informal sector businesses were often seen as being very labour intensive. Thus it was assumed that there was great potential for this sector to employ many unemployed people (Sethuraman, 1977 and Du Toit, 1981). Yet, once one takes into account the fact that most informal enterprises employed only five people or less, one must question exactly how great the sector's potential to create employment actually is.

Studies show that most informal sector labourers were related to the owner of the business and relatively few wage earners were employed in the sector. In Cali (Colombia) over 80 percent of the street traders worked without any assistants at all (Bromley, 1978a) and only 2 percent of those in the informal sector in Nairobi were wage employees (Bujra, 1978). In the Colombo study it was found that 85 percent of the informal enterprises were one person enterprises, and of the remainder, the majority only employed one or two individuals, excluding the owner (Marga Institute, 1981). In Jakarta only 10 percent of the enterprises in this sector had workers in addition to the head of the enterprise (Moir, 1981).

The number of workers employed did vary between the different sub sectors. In Jakarta employment levels were found to be higher in the manufacturing sector where only 58 percent were one man businesses (Moir, 1981). Other studies have found a similar trend; in general,

in the trading and small manufacturing sector, more people were employed (Fowler, 1981; 57, Kennedy, 1981: 584).

South African studies have produced similar results. In the Windhoek study 68 percent of the enterprises were one man operations, and 4 percent employed three people or more (Simon, 1984). In a Cape Town study 66 percent of the enterprises were one person businesses, and only 4 percent employed more than 3 people (Dewar and Watson, 1981). It was found in the Inanda and Clermont study that 63 percent of all the businesses surveyed were one person businesses and only 12 percent employed four or more people, including the proprietor (Nattrass and Glass, 1986: 38).

The employment potential of the informal sector thus appears to be limited, bearing in mind that it is the manufacturing sector which offers the greatest scope for employment and this is the sector most affected and restricted by developments in the formal sector. Every enterprise does, however, give work to at least one person and, particularly important, also to family members who could possibly not participate in the formal sector. Therein lies its value in employment generation.

3.5 Capital

Most informal sector participants experience a lack of capital and difficulty in raising it. This limits their ability to expand or to

establish themselves. A survey of a number of studies concluded that;

"...informal sector enterprises rely heavily on internal resources (owners, family and friends) for capital; ... the lack of credit is a major barrier to expansion and ... they are unable to obtain capital from either the banks or the government in the quantities they need at reasonable cost" (Richardson, 1984: 25; see also Jurado, 1981: 126 for Manila).

Yet, notwithstanding the difficulties inherent in obtaining capital, many did own capital equipment. In Freetown 80 percent of the sample owned some capital equipment (machines, tools, etc.), most of it being either low cost or home made equipment. In Lagos 80 percent of the enterprises financed the purchase of capital goods from their own savings, 17 percent borrowed from friends and relatives, while 86 percent said that the lack of capital and difficulty to obtain it was a major constraint (Fopohunda, 1981: 76).

The capital requirements varied between the different economic sub sectors. Manufacturing was found to be the most capital intensive sector and retail trading the least capital intensive (Fowler, 1981: 61). All the different subsectors experienced difficulty in obtaining working capital. It has been argued that this affects their operational efficiency and results in many enterprises going out of

business or forcing them to enter into a sub contractual relationship, thereby giving up their independence (Schmitz, 1982: 171).

It is very difficult for informal firms to obtain credit, the lack of adequate security often being the reason. Informal businesses seldom have a system of record keeping and consequently have no way of showing their financial credibility. Banks prefer lending for fixed capital investments rather than for the working capital which is so vital to an informal business (Richardson, 1984: 25). This was illustrated in the Lagos study where it was found that 82 percent of the operators had never attempted to seek credit, and, the majority of the remainder who had sought bank credit, said that they did not get it (Fopohunda, 1981:76).

In the case of South Africa the lack of capital and of prospects to obtain it appears to be the same as elsewhere. The South African State has however developed special mechanisms designed to provide scarce capital to small and informal businesses, yet Krige has argued, on the basis of a study done in KwaMashu (Natal), that these institutions are still not easily accessible to the very small black businesses (Krige, 1985). She argues that officials are often unaware of the physical, social and economic environments in which these businesses operate and consequently unconsciously place impossible demands upon them.

There is also evidence that in the Natal/KwaZulu region neither the

Small Business Development Corporation nor the KwaZulu Finance Corporation are reaching the informal sector adequately. In the Inanda survey, only 53 percent of the informal businessmen had heard of either of the two, and only 25 percent of the operators claimed to know what the corporations did (Nattrass & Glass, 1986).

In a recent study of the informal sector about a third of the respondents said that they had experienced difficulty in establishing and running their business because of a lack of capital. Yet, only 7 percent had said that the cost and availability of capital was the most important factor at present limiting their expansion (Nattrass, Krige and Nattrass, N.J. 1986). Amongst the manufacturing firms in the Factory Flat Survey, throughout KwaZulu, a lack of finance and cash flow problems were pointed out as being the major difficulties faced by the business proprietors, despite the fact that these firms had access to finance from the KwaZulu Finance Corporation and so were in a relatively preferred position, vis a vis the true informal sector operator (Nattrass, N.J., 1984b).

In the Inanda and Clermont studies it was found that, whilst few firms comprised high profit undertakings, there was a clear divide evident between the majority of the firms who earned low profits and were clearly members of the community of the poor and the smaller group, earning profits of more than R200 per month (Nattrass and Glass, 1986: 119).

Clearly the lack of capital could be regarded as one of the most

pressing constraints that the informal sector faces, regardless to which subsector it belongs to.

3.6 The Physical and Economic Environment

In South Africa many informal sector businesses operate in the townships outside large cities. This means that operators have to travel to the city in order to obtain certain raw materials. If they intend to trade in the city they are faced with the problem of licencing and possible eviction.

The conditions that prevail in the townships are often not conducive to succesful business. There is a lack of infrastructure. For example many people do not have electricity, the roads are poor, telephones are scarce and many do not have their own means of transport. Informal businesses are also often isolated, being far away from post offices, banks, building societies, other shops and railway stations.

A good example of the above is the findings of the Inanda study: Business premises were, in the majority of cases, of an informal nature, i.e. shack developments.

The majority of operators surveyed in this area were more than 20 minutes walking distance from a bank or building society and from formal factories. Fifty four percent and 45 percent respectively were

more than 20 minutes from a post office and other shops.

There were only three stretches of tarred road in Inanda. Despite the poor road network there was, however, a reasonable penetration of buses and taxis into the survey area. There were no rail facilities in Inanda; neither were there any in Clermont.

This inadequate environment often becomes a constraint on the business. It increases the operational costs and inevitably also the chance of failure. Policy makers intending to develop the informal sector need to pay close attention to this area.

3.7 Summary

It is clear from the studies mentioned, that the informal sector characteristics can and do vary between different enterprises and in different countries. Yet, some generalisations can, however, be made regarding the characteristics of the sector.

No generalisations regarding sexual dominance in the sector can be made. Most informal sector operators are fairly young - between 25 and 35 years of age. Informal sector operators were also found to be poorly educated and were often illiterate.

It was found that the income levels of informal sector enterprises differ between the subsectors within the informal sector, small scale manufacturers, maintenance and repair establishments, for example, are more lucrative than those subsectors requiring few skills.

The informal sector employs fewer people than is usually expected. In fact, most informal enterprises employ five or less people.

It is apparent that over the last ten years much information has been collected to document the characteristics of the informal sector. The value of this is that it gives an indication of the characteristics and the subdivisions of and within the sector.

3.8 Conclusion

A study of the available literature on the informal sector characteristics is advantageous in that it clearly highlights the heterogeneous nature of the sector as well as the different subsectors within the sector, thus making generalisations about the sector often invalid. Yet, it must be emphasised that the informal sector is not an entity on its own, but that it has linkages with and fits into the larger economy of a country (Tokman, 1978; Bienefeld, 1978; Gerry and Birbeck, 1981).

With the above in mind the next chapter looks at an approach which can accommodate both the heterogeneous nature of the sector as well as showing how the sector can fit into the wider economy.

CHAPTER 4

THE MARGINALITY APPROACH AND GARBAGE PICKERS

The concept of marginality originated in the study of rural to urban migration. Squatter or informal settlements which formed on the edge of South American cities were regarded as marginal in the sense that they were located outside the urban limits and beyond the reaches of normal urban facilities.

The term came to be used in a much wider sense to include many social, economical and psychological aspects of shanty town life. The lack of political decision making power also became regarded as characteristic of marginality. The concept is applicable to cleavages existing between broader sectors of society as well, and not only between peri-urban and urban populations (Germani, 1980).

4.1 Definitions of Marginalisation

According to Perlman marginality is not caused by external symptoms such as the poor housing and living conditions of the South-American favelas but by the historical process of urbanisation. "Marginalisation is the consequence of a new model of development (or underdevelopment) that has, as a basic characteristic, the exclusion of vast sectors of the population from its main productive apparatus" (Perlman, 1976:251). Perlman also regards dependency as central to

discussions of marginalisation. Large segments of the population are excluded from the mainstream of society and, as such, they form a dependent group. Their dependency is defined by their integration or lack thereof, into the functions of the external economy. The marginalised sector is excluded from the decision-making processes of the existing social system. An example of marginalised people who are in a position of dependency because they have no access to the decision-making process would be the chronically unemployed.

Germani defines marginality as the lack of, and exclusion from participation in possible roles in society.

"In reality, what is commonly supposed in any definition of marginality is not the simple lack of participation, or exercise of roles, in either a general or a specific area or in given spheres in human activity, but the lack of participation in those spheres which are considered to be within the radius of action and/or access of the individual or group. Marginality is imputed through a comparison between a de facto situation and a certain model: the role set which the individual or group should play according to given a priori principles" (Germani, 1980:9).

Marginality can be caused by socio-economic, socio-political, demographic, cultural, socio-psychological and personality factors.

Many authors, especially those writing about marginality in South-America, implicitly assume that the informal sector is autonomous from the formal sector. Indeed, in many instances the informal sector is regarded as a marginal sector precisely because it does appear to be separate from the formal sector or the rest of the economy, and is excluded from access to the resources of production and the formal product markets. Nevertheless, despite its apparent exclusion, the informal sector remains subordinated to and dependent on the formal sector (Tokman, 1978:169). Operators in the sector lack any real economic decision-making power. However, notwithstanding the fact that they exist at the margin of the dominant economic and social system, informal operators still remain part of the overall system.

"In some instances the informal sector is equated with the 'marginal' sector. This depicts the idea of an excluded sub stratum of an under-class beneath the low-class insiders. In this way of thinking marginality is the result of a stratification process taking place within the working class as a consequence of industrialisation" (Moller, 1986: 6).

Germani's conception of multi dimensional marginality locates the marginalised people vis-a-vis the larger society in the longer term. He argues that if the marginal sector is placed outside the system of stratification, it imputes to the marginal situation a radical or total character that is incomparable to any other condition or location within society. To do this, he argues, would be theoretically and analytically unfruitful. However, on the other hand, if the marginal sector is located in such a way that it is seen in relation to the larger society of which it is considered to be a part, albeit a marginal part, then it can be analysed in terms of the degree of marginality that is experienced. Total or absolute marginality would imply that the group in question is completely separated from the rest of society and is deprived of any form of participation, either active or passive, and has no communication or any other type of relation to society at large (Germani, 1980:8 as quoted in Moller, 1986:7).

Societal segments could then be usefully located in terms of how closely they approach, or do not approach, total marginality. This concept of marginality appears to be more useful from an analytical viewpoint since the marginality argument would have little value if it had solely to advocate complete autonomy from the formal sector. Gerry, too, feels that to advocate autonomy would result in marginality analysis falling into the trap of "sterile and counterproductive dualism" which would militate against the discovery of "the crucial dialectic which connects the twin poles of urban production and drives the system onwards" (Gerry, 1978:1148).

As has been pointed out earlier, the informal sector cannot operate independently from the formal sector or, for that matter from the economy as a whole. This sector is dependent on the formal sector for its raw materials, capital, and markets. Dependence is also manifested in the supply of products by the informal sector to the formal sector. In respect of the capital goods employed in the informal sector the sector faces a virtual monopoly by the formal sector in terms of the supply of these goods and their subsequent repair and maintenance (Gerry, 1978; Tokman, 1978).

Although the informal sector has significant links with the rest of the economy it, at the same time, presents a considerable degree of self containment. This autonomy is manifested particularly by the fact that the informal sector supplies its own demand for many of the products it produces, through the role played by informal commerce, and the sale of second hand goods which reduces the transference of value outside the sector (Nattrass, N.J, 1984a:20).

The overall extent of the informal sector's marginality is manifested in its subordinate position, vis a vis, the formal sector of the economy. The informal sector's access to resources and markets is often controlled and limited by the formal sector. However, it must be appreciated that the informal sector is not a homogenous entity but consists of a variety of subsectors and further, that the degree of marginality experienced by the subsectors will differ. The extent of the exclusion of a sub-sector of the informal sector will be largely

determined by the linkages that exist between it and the formal sector, and the access the sub-sector has to vital resources and markets. Some subsectors of the informal sector will be less dependent on the formal sector because they have some bargaining power. This bargaining power may come from their geographical location. For example, in South Africa, the informal sector can penetrate areas like the black townships which are often inaccessible to formal sector operators. The more marginalised sections such as the survival subsectors of street trading and garbage picking lack such bargaining strength in general. They find themselves almost completely dependent on the formal sector and, therefore, one can say that these sectors are highly likely to be marginalised and, further, that ironically, it is their very dependence on the formal sector that has marginalised them from the wider society.

Marginalised subsectors of the informal sector such as garbage picking and hawking are entered into often simply because the person entering is, himself, marginalised from the socio-economic system to the extent that he/she has no other alternative means of survival.

4.2 The Garbage Picker and Marginality

The garbage picker, as part of the informal sector, can be regarded as being, in some senses, doubly marginalised (politically, economically as well as socially) since he/she is not only excluded/marginalised from the formal sector of the economy, but also from the rest of the

informal sector whose members appear to regard the picker with scorn and disdain.

In a country like South Africa, where unemployment is a problem, and the state does not provide adequate welfare or social security, the marginalised are left to their own devices (Lomnitz, 1977:111). It will be shown later in this study that the garbage pickers were, in general, otherwise unemployed and, like many others in similar positions in LDC's, had turned to the informal sector and to garbage picking as a means of survival. Garbage pickers, scavenge on the garbage dumps and sell or re-use the usable items they find even, in some cases, to the extent of eating any left over food they find.

The garbage pickers certainly seemed to be aware of their marginalisation: in answer to the question "How do the people in your community view your type of work?", most responded by saying that they were regarded with suspicion and ridicule and were despised by their communities.

According to Moller;

"Consciousness of marginality, is also necessary so that a marginal sector can take initiatives, or participate in initiatives, with the end of modifying its situation" (Moller, 1986:8).

However, Moller's view seems to be a contradiction, since marginalised people are powerless and are marginalised because of this powerlessness. Whilst consciousness of their situation, may be a necessary condition for the institution of any remedial action by the marginalised, it will certainly not be a sufficient condition to guarantee such action.

There is not much that the pickers can do to change the conditions they work under. In practice, they are continually faced with police harassment, with very unsympathetic municipal workers and waste company managers, who regard the presense of pickers on the garbage dumps as undesirable. Some evidence was, however, obtained that showed that the pickers have, when necessary combined to fight for their right to be allowed to continue to pick. For example, when threatened with exclusion from the Westville dump near Durban, as a result of the militant action of the pickers (they set dumps and machinery alight and threatened the lives of guards) the decision to stop the pickers' access to the dump was rescinded and they were allowed to continue to pick on the dump.

Not only were the pickers surveyed part of a marginalised group, but a significant number of them were also found to be in a very clear dependency relationship, with the formal sector, being dependent on the large waste recyclers for a market for their products. The waste industry, on the other hand is also, but to a very much lesser degree, dependent on the garbage picker for the collection of waste to be recycled. It is thus in the interest of the waste industry to

encourage the pickers so long as the costs of their products are lower than any alternative means of garbage separation, since this is an essential process in the recycling of garbage.

Whilst it is generally accepted that the informal sector is a marginal sector and further that the degree of marginalisation varies within the sector itself, relatively little work has been done on the detailed aspects of the marginalised sub-sectors. This study of the garbage pickers in and around Durban, is an attempt to fill in this information vacuum.

The aim of the study was to find out where garbage picking fits into the informal sector and the extent and nature of the links that the sector may have with the rest of the informal sector as well as with the formal sector of the economy.

The study is discussed in detail in the remainder of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

5.1 Introduction

"There is no sight that so impressively advertises the existence of poverty as does that of the garbage picker at work. If anything represents the employment and income problems of a 'developing economy then it is Cali's 'vultures' as they sort through what other people have chosen to throw away" (Birkbeck, 1979:161).

It is generally assumed that the garbage picker is forced to pick because he or she cannot find employment elsewhere. The garbage picker is also often regarded as a vagrant who is too lazy to find employment elsewhere.¹

This research was conducted partly because the researcher suspected that the garbage picker is, indeed, a worker who is part of an industrial system and who does this work because there is no alternative open to him or her. It is also presumed that the pickers sell their collections and, therefore, form part of the informal sector.

1. This was the attitude held towards the pickers by most of the people in the formal waste industry who were interviewed by the researcher.

In the next section which deals with the empirical findings, the work done by the garbage picker in part of Durban's metropolitan area is examined. Information is also obtained relating to the nature of the role the garbage picker plays in the economy. Through questions relating to the picker's income, an attempt will be made to determine whether garbage picking is a viable survival strategy or not.

Since the picker forms part of the informal sector, this study will be regarded as a micro-study of this sector and, as such, it should help to further the understanding of the overall economic role played by the informal sector in the economy.

5.2 The Survey Methodology

In order to determine the ND extent and nature of the garbage picking activity within the informal sector, an empirical study was done on three garbage dumps in the greater Durban area.

^{The survey was}
The following information was obtained by means of a survey:

1. The demographic characteristics of the pickers, in terms of sex, age, marital status, educational qualifications, place of birth and residential status in the area.
2. The income collected through the the collection of garbage and the major uses thereof.

3. The relationship between the average income, age and sex of the picker, his/her level of education and the picker's experience in this occupation.
4. The relationship between income earned and the types of items collected.
5. The working conditions and hardships endured by pickers.

5.2.1 The Sample Frame *to questionnaire*

A survey was conducted during November and December 1985 among Durban's garbage pickers and scavengers. A structured, pre-coded interview schedule was used which included questions relating to demography, income, work patterns and attitudes to the work being done. A copy of the questionnaire is given in Appendix I. A total of 96 people were interviewed, 69 of whom were interviewed at the Westville dump, 10 in Pinetown and 18 at the Springfield garbage dump.

These dumps were chosen as survey sites for two reasons : firstly because of the presence of pickers on these dumps; secondly, because, with some difficulty, permission could be obtained from the appropriate authorities to conduct interviews with the pickers on the respective dumps.

Pickers were interviewed at random, although some bias was introduced by their presence on the dump and by their willingness to be interviewed. Some of the people were embarrassed to be approached but very few actually refused to be interviewed. The interviews lasted, on average, for half an hour. It became clear to the interviewers as the research proceeded that the topic of the research was highly emotive from the picker's view point and many expressed the hope that through the study, their lot might be improved.

At Pinetown only 10 pickers were allowed on the dump to pick. Consequently, the whole universe of pickers on this dump were surveyed. At Westville not all the pickers were interviewed, as the sample size was considered adequate. A smaller sample was used on the Springfield dump than was the case at Westville, because the pickers were only allowed to pick for two hours a day on this dump, and it was felt by the researcher that by interviewing pickers they were being kept from their work.

Although the scientific basis on which the sample was selected was certainly far short of ideal, it was, nevertheless, felt that it was the best that could be done in the difficult circumstances and that data obtained would, despite the sample limitations, still be extremely useful as descriptive of the situations prevailing in the garbage picking aspect of the waste industry in the Durban area. However, it should be appreciated that the bias in the sample prevents the generalisation of the findings to garbage pickers in other areas.

CHAPTER 6

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PICKERS SURVEYED

6.1 The Age and Sex Structure of the Sample

If garbage picking is marginalised to the point at which it becomes solely a strategy for survival, one would expect to find it dominated by people who cannot find alternative employment. From the sex ratio point of view, because women in general experience more difficulty in obtaining work, one might expect to find a predominance of women amongst the pickers. In January 1986 for example, of the unemployed Blacks counted in the Current Population Survey, 53 percent were women and 47 percent were men (Statistical News Release, 1986: 374).

Women are discriminated against in the formal workplace and there is no reason to assume that their position will be that different in the informal economy. This being so one would expect women to filter down to the lowest occupational strata in the informal sector in much the same way as they do in the formal sector and to be relatively overrepresented in areas such as garbage picking. In actuality, however, although women did make up the majority of the sample (56 percent of the pickers surveyed), the extent of their dominance was lower than expected.

In view of the higher than expected presence of men it is useful to ask why there were so many men scavenging on garbage dumps? South Africa has been experiencing an economic recession during the last few years. As a result more men than usual are unemployed and they have to find an alternative way to support themselves and their families. Garbage picking offers one such an alternative.

The age distribution of the pickers surveyed is also very interesting and is given in Table 6.1 below.

Age pickers
Table 6.1 : The Age Distribution of the Sample (1)

Age	Number in Category	Percent of Total	Cumulative Percent
0 - 10 yrs	2	2,1	2,1
11 - 20 yrs	25	26,0	28,1
21 - 30 yrs	29	30,2	58,3
31 - 40 yrs	20	20,8	79,2
41 - 50 yrs	7	7,3	86,5
51 - 60 yrs	7	7,3	93,8
60 + yrs	6	6,3	100,0
Total	96	100,0	

Describe age pickers
The majority of scavengers fell into the young age groups; 26 percent were between the ages of 11 and 20 years and 30 percent were aged between 21 and 30 years, which means that 58 percent were aged 30 years or less. A further 20 percent fell into the age category of between 31 and 40 years. The mean average age of the pickers was 31 years but 50 percent were aged 27 years or under. The difference

between the mean age of the sample and the median age again illustrates the relative predominance of the younger age groups.

The age breakdown by sex is given in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 : The Age/Sex Distribution of the Sample¹

Age Group	Percentage of Sample Category		Percentage of Age Category	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
0 - 10 yrs	0	1,0	-	100,0
11 - 20 yrs	21,0	5,2	80,0	20,0
21 - 30 yrs	8,3	21,9	27,6	72,4
31 - 40 yrs	7,3	13,5	35,0	65,0
41 - 50 yrs	3,1	4,2	42,9	57,1
51 - 60 yrs	1,0	6,2	14,3	85,7
61 +	2,1	4,2	33,3	66,7
	42,8	56,2	42,8	56,2

Not all the pickers responded to the question regarding sex (n = 95).

The men appear on average to be younger than the women. Twenty-one percent of the pickers between the age of 11 and 20 years were men whereas only 5,2 percent of the women fell into this age group. The majority of women were aged between 21 and 40 years old. All the children under 10 years were female, and 80 percent of adolescents were male.

1. All percentages used, unless stated otherwise, refer to the percentage of the total sample.

Whilst the fact that adult men have better prospects, on average, of entering the formal job market than do women, can explain the dominance of women in the adult age categories. It is not easy to find a similar explanation for the dominance of the boys amongst the adolescent workers. Perhaps the reason here relates to a family's desire to protect their younger girls from conditions on the dumps.

6.2 Marital Status ✓

Sixty-seven percent of the sample had never been married, 11 percent were married and the remainder (21 percent) were either living with someone, widowed or divorced.

6.3 Family Size

Pickers were questioned on the size of their family, its structure and whether or not they were the sole breadwinners. From the answers obtained it appeared that the size of the family varied between two and sixteen people, with the mean family size being six people. Nearly two thirds of the pickers had between one and five children, 6,3 percent had between six and ten children. The relatively high percentage (31 percent) who had no children is explained by the overall youthfulness of the sample.

6.4 The Importance of the Earnings from Picking to the Family

Table 6.3 contains data showing the breakdown of the sample in terms of whether the picker was the sole earner in the family or not.

Table 6.3: The Distribution by the Number of Earners in the Family 5

Category	Percentage of	
	Men	Women
Sole breadwinner	65	72
More than one earner	35	28
Percentage of Sample	43	57

Studies of other subsectors of the informal economy have shown clearly that a significant proportion of the operators in some sectors work only to supplement their family incomes (Krige, 1985). If the garbage picking sector is acting as a buffer for the destitute, as was hypothesised earlier, then one would expect that a high proportion of the pickers would be the sole breadwinner in their family or at the very least, that the other breadwinners would also be engaged in similar survival activities.

Taking the sample as a whole, 69 percent of the pickers said that they were the sole earners in their family. Amongst those who were

not the only earner, 13,5 percent said that they were helped by live-in relatives other than their immediate family. Of the additional earners only 23 percent were in receipt of a regular wage. A higher proportion of the women (72 percent) said that they were the sole earners in their families which, again, is illustrative of the more disadvantaged position of women in general.

Taking these findings together, they are a clear indication of the degree of poverty and desperation that pushes people into garbage picking and are evidence of the survival role played by the sector itself.

6.5 The Rural Links of the Garbage Pickers ✓

In an urban situation where the rate of rural-urban migration is high and influx control has operated to institutionalise a system of circulating migration, one would expect that a low level occupation like garbage picking would be dominated by relatively recent entrants to the urban economy who have left their families in the rural areas (due to influx control). In an attempt to test this hypothesis, pickers in the sample were asked when they left the rural areas (if at all) and their answers are given in Table 6.4

Table 6.4 : Rural Urban Migrants by Length of Urban Residence (4)

Date of Departure from Rural Area	Percentage of Sample Born in Rural Areas in Category
Less than 6 months ago	3,3
6 months to 1 year	4,9
1 - 2 years	8,3
2 - 4 years	3,2
5 years and over	80,3
	100,0

The data in Table 6.4, relating to the residence of the scavengers, shows very clearly that the hypothesis relating to recent urban entrants is not correct. Although 70 percent of the sample said they had been born in a rural area, 73 percent of the rural born, also said that they had been living in the town for longer than five years. Further, 76 percent of those surveyed, said that they lived with their families - suggesting that garbage picking as an occupation is dominated by the well established urban poor rather than by new rural entrants.

6.6 The Educational Qualifications of the Pickers

The educational profile of the pickers surveyed is contained in the data given in Tables 6.5 and 6.6.

Table 6.5 : Education Levels by Sex (5)

Highest Level of Education Attained	Percentage of sample in category		
	Male	Female	Total
Less than Std. 3	12,5	23,0	35,5
Std. 3-5	13,5	16,7	30,2
Std. 6-8	15,7	15,7	31,4
Literate	1,0	1,0	2,0
Total	42,7	56,4	99,1

Not all the pickers responded to the question regarding sex (n=95).

The majority of the pickers (64,5 percent) had reached an educational level of standard three or above and, as such, can be taken to be functionally literate. However, the overall average educational levels were low and 50 percent of the sample had completed only Standard 4 (6 years of formal schooling). At the higher end of the spectrum 14,5 percent of the total sample had a junior certificate (10 years of schooling), while only two percent had a full school education.

The men were generally better educated than the women; 39 percent of the men had reached an educational level higher than Standard 5, whereas only 32 percent of the women had reached the same level of education.

Table 6.6 contains data showing educational profiles by age.

Table 6.6 : Education Levels by Age¹

Age Category	Percentage of Sample in Age Category by Highest Level of Education Reached			
	Less than Std 3 (Percentage)	Standard 3 - 5 (Percentage)	Standard 6 - 8 (Percentage)	Over Stan- dard 8 (Percentage)
0 - 10 years	2,1	-	-	-
11 - 20 years	11,5	7,3	7,3	-
21 - 30 years	7,3	8,3	12,5	2,1
31 - 40 years	5,2	9,3	6,3	-
Over 40 years	10,4	5,2	5,2	-
N = 96	36,5	30,1	31,3	2,1

The overall conclusion to be drawn from the data in Table 6.6, is that even in this sample where educational levels are, in general, low, the better educated are to be found among the younger generations. Fifty percent of the age group 21 - 30 years had complete primary education or more, as against only 28 percent of those older than 30 years.

However, bearing in mind the nature of the garbage picking sector, the high percentage of people under 30 with education also provides some evidence of the fact that this group cannot find formal employment, despite their education. This could be the result of their lack of

1. None of the pickers interviewed had reported Std. 9 as being the highest level of education they had reached.

work experience, as well a reflection of the present economic recession being experienced in the country. A similar finding is documented in the survey of informal business in the Inanda area, also in Durban (Nattrass and Glass, 1984: 12).

Access to a formal sector job is not simply a matter of obtaining education. In a study of 187 African households covering 220 employed adults, 163 unemployed adults, and 137 school going children done in Port Elizabeth in 1984, it was found that for the majority of Africans destined to work at a semi-skilled or unskilled level, factors such as age, sex, previous experience, and access to contacts who were already employed, were more important in ensuring that an individual found a job than education. The reasons for this were complex, and the researchers commented;

"The operation of internal labour markets, the de-skilling of jobs, the recession and the need to control the labour force all interacted to downgrade education as a giver of life's chances" (Gilmour and Roux : 1984, p.40).

6.7 An Overview of the Demography of the Garbage Pickers

In summary, the major demographic characteristics of the garbage pickers surveyed were:

1. Both sexes were represented, women being in the majority.
2. The majority of pickers were young (between 15 and 35 years of age).
3. The mean family size of pickers was six people and 69 percent were the sole bread winner in the family.
4. Most pickers were unmarried.
5. The pickers were poorly educated and many were illiterate.

These findings correspond closely to the findings of the ILO study as well as to those of the other case studies discussed in Chapter 2 and suggest that, whilst one might argue that garbage picking as a subsector of the informal sector is amongst one of the lowest opportunity sectors, the people who work in it do not differ all that significantly from those who work in the other subsectors.

CHAPTER 7

GARBAGE PICKING AS AN OCCUPATION : IS IT A TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT OCCUPATION?

7.1 The Length of Time spent as a Picker

In keeping with the other sectors of the informal sector, that have been identified as survival sectors such as hawking and small-time craft manufacture (Hart, 1973), one would hypothesise that if garbage picking is seen as a survival strategy then it would be viewed by those in the activity, as a temporary occupation - something to tide them over until they can find a better paying and more pleasant type of work. Under these circumstances one would expect a relatively high rate of labour turnover in the occupation. There are two aspects to whether or not garbage picking is seen as a temporary occupation. Firstly, whether the occupation is, in fact, one that experiences a high rate of entry and exit, i.e. whether people actually leave the sub sector as soon as they can do better. Secondly, whether or not people working in the sector perceive it as a temporary occupation, whether they, in fact, leave it or not. Both of these aspects are examined in this section.

To see to what extent there was a high labour turnover in the sector, pickers were asked how long they had been picking garbage and their answers are tabulated below in Table 7.1

**Table 7.1 : The Distribution of the Sample
by the Number of Years Spent Picking**

Number of Years Spent Picking	Number in category	Percent of Sample	Cumulative Percentage
Less than 1 yr	18	18,8	18,8
1 - 3 yrs	64	66,7	85,5
4 - 6 yrs	8	8,3	93,8
7 - 10 yrs	3	3,1	96,9
11 - 15 yrs	2	2,1	99,0
Over 15 yrs	1	1,0	100,0
<hr/>			
	96	=	100

The data in Table 7.1 show that indeed there was a high rate of labour turnover in the sector. By far the majority of the pickers interviewed, 86 percent, had been garbage picking for less than three years, 67 percent of the pickers said that they had been picking for between 1 and 3 years and 19 percent for less than a year. This shows clearly that most pickers interviewed had only been doing this work for a relatively short time and does suggest that picking is seen as a temporary measure by the pickers and is probably tied to the overall economic trends in the country.

7.2 Time Spent by Sex of the Picker

Since men have better access to formal sector work than women they are even less likely to seek garbage picking as a permanent occupation and

a higher percentage of them are likely to have been picking for a relatively short time. To test whether this hypothesis was correct the data was re-analysed in terms of the sex of the pickers and the results are given in Table 7.2.

Although the difference between the work history of the sexes is not as marked as one might expect, given the differences in access to the labour market, nevertheless, 27 percent of the men had been picking for less than one year as against 13 percent of woman in this category and 90 percent of the men had been picking for three years or less, whereas 83 percent of the women were in this category.

Table 7.2 Distribution of Sample by Sex of the Picker and the Number of years Picking

No. of Years Spent Picking	Sex			
	Male	Percentage of Sex Category	Female	Percentage of Sex Category
	Percentage of Sample		Percentage of Sample	
Under 1 yr	11,5	27,0	7,3	13,0
1 - 3 yrs	27,0	63,4	39,0	70,4
4 - 6 yrs	2,1	5,0	6,3	11,1
7 - 10 yrs	1,0	2,4	1,0	2,0
Over 10 yrs	1,0	2,4	2,0	4,0
	42,6	100	56	100

Taken as a whole, however, the number of years that women have been picking is not significantly different from that found for men,¹

1. A chi-square test carried out on the data obtained was not significant at the 0,05 level ($\chi^2 = 0,95$ df = 1), and so it is concluded that there is no difference between the sexes and numbers of years picking.

except that many more women (12,8 percent) fell into the 4 - 6 yrs category than did men (6,7 percent). This leads one to suspect that women are affected first by an economic recession, and are possibly more vulnerable.

7.3 Time Spent by Age of Picker

If garbage picking was a preferred occupation rather than a survival or fallback-strategy one would expect the length of time that a picker had spent picking to be positively correlated to his/her age. Table 7.3 relates picking time to the age of the picker.

**Table 7.3 : Distribution of Sample by Age and the
Number of Years Picking**

Age of Picker	Percentage of Sample in Category				Total
	Number of Years Spent Picking				
	1-3 yrs	4-6 yrs	7-10 yrs	over 10 yrs	
0 - 10	1,3	-	1,3	-	2,6
11 - 20	21,9	2,6	-	1,3	25,1
21 - 30	26,9	2,6	-	1,3	30,8
31 - 40	19,2	2,6	1,3	-	22,8
41 - 50	1,3	1,3	-	-	2,6
51 - 60	6,4	-	1,3	1,3	9,0
60 +	4,2	1,0	-	-	5,2
n = 78	81,4	10,1	3,9	3,9	100,0

Eighteen (18,7 percent) pickers had been picking for less than a year and are, therefore, not included in this Table.

The data show that in all age groups, the majority of pickers had only been picking for a relatively short time, between 1 and 3 years. Exceptions did, however, occur, for instance 1 percent of pickers between the ages of 21 and 50 years said that they had been picking for more than 6 years.

Although only two children were interviewed, many more children were seen on the dumps. It seems that some children spend time helping to collect garbage on the city's dumps, probably because the mothers work for themselves and are not supervised, and so can take the children to the dump where they can keep an eye on them. The author saw young children playing on the dumps. It is then only natural that these children should start collecting items, either to play with, to help their mothers or to sell for pocket money.

7.4 Time Spent by Levels of Education Reached

Table 7.4 contains data relating educational levels to the length of time the picker had been picking on the dumps.

Table 7.4 : Level of Education by Number of Years Picking

Level of Education	Number of Years Spent Picking				Percentage in Education Category
	1-3 yrs	4-6 yrs	7-10 yrs	Over 10 yrs	
	%	%	%	%	
Less than Std. 3	22,0	4,2	3,1	1,0	36,5
Std 3 - 5	21,0	2,2	-	1,0	30,1
Std 6 - 8	22,0	2,2	-	1,0	31,3
Matric	2,1	-	-	-	2,1
	67,1	8,6	3,1	3,0	100,0

The data confirms the earlier findings that education does not appear to be a significant variable determining whether or not a person enters the garbage picking sector. Indeed, irrespective of the educational level reached, the majority of pickers had only been picking for from one to three years. Those pickers who were functionally illiterate were found in most categories indicating the length of time spent in picking, as indeed were those with higher levels of education. Thirteen percent had picked for from 4 to 6 years and 10 percent for 7 to 10 years, and 3 percent for more than 10 years.

7.5 Work History

In a further attempt to identify the socio-economic role played by garbage pickers, the scavengers were questioned about their work history. Fifty-three percent of the pickers interviewed said that

they had never had a steady paying job. Of these 58 percent were women and 38 percent men.

Members of the subsample of 47 pickers who had previously been employed were asked; What their last job was? Why they left that job? What they had earned? And how long ago they had held a job? The replies are discussed below.

Table 7.5 contains data showing the kind of employment the picker had previously held.

Table 7.5 : Previous Employment of Picker

Sector or Occupation	Number	Percent of Total
Manufacturing	6	13
Construction	6	13
Domestic	18	38
Sales	4	8
Security	2	4
Messenger	2	4
Labourer	8	17
Railways	1	1
Total	47	100

It is clear from the data that the majority of the pickers who had had formal sector wage jobs had been employed in low skilled occupations since 68 percent had been employed as either domestic servants, building workers or labourers.

Only 23 pickers gave data relating to their previous earnings. Wages reported were low and varied between R15 and R90 per month. Because most pickers had been picking for more than a year, these figures can only be taken as a rough indication of their alternative earning capacity.

The reasons given for leaving the previous job were varied. Ten of the 38 who answered the question (26 percent), said they had been retrenched - they were all men. Whilst amongst the other reasons given were health reasons (16 percent), inadequate wages (13 percent), and firms closure (24 percent).

The view advanced earlier that the unexpectedly large number of men who were found picking, is a result of the current economic recession being experienced by the country, is further supported by the fact that the majority of men, when asked, gave retrenchment as the reason why they had left their previous job.

Turning to the other aspect of the 'temporary nature of the work' - the pickers own view of the occupation, pickers were asked whether they would rather be formally employed and, if so, why they held that view. In answer to the first part of this question, 58 percent of the pickers said that they would prefer a wage job and gave the following reasons:

- (i) picking is not stimulating work;
- (ii) they need to earn more;
- (iv) pickers need a permanent job;
- (v) their work is insecure, in that they can be evicted at any time
- (vi) police harassment
- (vii) pickers have no access to a workers union and
- (viii) the picker has an education or trade which he is not using while picking.

Another factor which influences the temporary nature of garbage picking as an occupation is the legal position of the pickers. From the answers given by the pickers it is clear that eviction from the dumps by police is also one of the factors which forces them to regard their position as temporary. The pickers are legally regarded as trespassers on private property, and are prosecuted on this basis. In addition the researcher was told that legislation has been proposed for 1987 whereby it will become illegal for anyone not formally employed in the garbage industry, to collect garbage on dumps.

In the case of the Westville dump, these were pickers who were officially permitted by the respective firm managing the dump - (in this case, Waste Tech) to pick on the dump - the other pickers on

this dump then being technically illegal. Since Mr. A (and those picking for him) was Waste-Tech's sole sub contractor. The relationship between Waste-Tech and Mr. A can be seen as an attempt by Waste-Tech to control the numbers of pickers present on the dump.

Prior to Waste-Tech's control of the Westville dump, it was managed by the Westville municipality who did not have either the means or the manpower to control the number of pickers on the dumps effectively. In this period, the pickers picking were subjected to the minimum harassment. As a result, when Waste-tech started to manage the Westville dump they were opposed to the idea of pickers and did not initially allow anyone to pick on the dump. This decision was, however, strongly resisted by the pickers. The dump was set on fire, a nightwatchman was stabbed and Waste-tech machinery was damaged. Waste-tech compromised with the pickers by allowing twenty people to pick for Mr. A. These pickers carry identity cards with them, which they show during raids by the authorities. Other pickers on the Westville dump are, strictly speaking, illegal. However, Waste-tech is still finding it very difficult to control the number of pickers on the dump, despite the above mentioned strategy and police raids.

7.6 Seeking Alternative Work

Finally, in an attempt to ascertain the extent to which pickers really did view their present occupation as a 'stop gap' or survival exercise, pickers were asked whether they were actually seeking other occupations. In answer to this question a massive 85,4 percent stated

that they were.

7.7 Conclusion - A Survival Strategy

Taking all the evidence presented in this chapter, it is clear from the picker's work history, both in the garbage industry and in the formal sector of the economy that garbage picking is, indeed, regarded as a temporary occupation by the pickers. It is an occupation that is essentially a fall back strategy, one that is entered into in order to survive and because the picker has no other means open to him. Equally clearly, it is not a preferred occupation and is disliked by the occupants. It is an occupation that will be left as soon as the individual concerned can find a better alternative.

CHAPTER 8

THE ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF GARBAGE PICKING

8.1 Items Collected, the Use thereof and the Links with the Formal and Informal Sector

A wide variety of products pass through to the garbage dumps from throw outs from private homes, to the waste products of the retail trade and the large scale waste disposal that occurs from certain industries. The mix of collectable items selected by the people picking garbage is of significant analytical interest, since, not only will it be a determinant of the individual picker's income, but also of the extent and the nature of the linkage relationships that will be built up between the pickers as a group, and both the informal and formal sectors of the economy.

Consequently, the pickers surveyed were asked a series of questions relating to the commodities they picked and the use to which they put their collection, i.e. whether they sold it?, if so to whom?, whether they used it themselves or used it as an input into a manufacturing process - the output from which was used or sold?

The replies relating to the nature of the products picked are given in Table 8.1 below. The results show that the scavengers will collect virtually anything that is of value either because it can be of use in

their homes or because it can be sold. Although scavenging for own use was widespread, pickers did, however, tend to concentrate most of their efforts on collecting specific items which can be sold in the townships and squatter areas, to recyclers, to scrapyards, to garages and to hawkers/brokers. The data in Table 8.1 show the range of the items collected and the number of scavengers who stated that they collected particular items.

A large number of pickers (43,8 percent) pick up clothes and material. These are regarded as very valuable. Indeed, it appeared from conversation that most pickers actually clothed themselves in their findings on the dumps. Shoes and gloves are particularly important to the picker because they can be used to protect his/her hands and feet from being hurt while scavenging on the dump.

Food items were also picked up on the dump largely it seemed for the picker's own use. From answers obtained in conversation it appeared that many, if not most, of the pickers did actually eat off the garbage dumps.¹ An even greater proportion of pickers may actually collect food items than admitted to it since the question appeared, understandably, to cause some embarrassment.

1. The author saw a man carry a carcass from the dump on his back. The carcass had probably been dumped by a butcher and it was assumed that the bones were going to be used to make soup.

Table 8.1 : Items Collected by Pickers by Frequency¹

Item Collected	No of Pickers Collecting	Percent of Total Pickers
Paper/Cardboard ²	5	2,6
Bottles	19	10,0
Metal	9	5,0
Plastic	32	17,0
Clothes/material	42	22,3
Organic/food	29	15,4
Wood	22	11,7
Other	30	16,0

N = 188

The thirty pickers who picked "other" items, picked the following:

Item Collected	Percentage of Total
Copper	61,5
Sail	34,3
Valuable Items	4,2
Planks	11,5
Soap	1,0
Buckets	4,2

N = 188

The multiple use aspects of garbage picking are further illustrated by the answers obtained from a question relating to the end use the

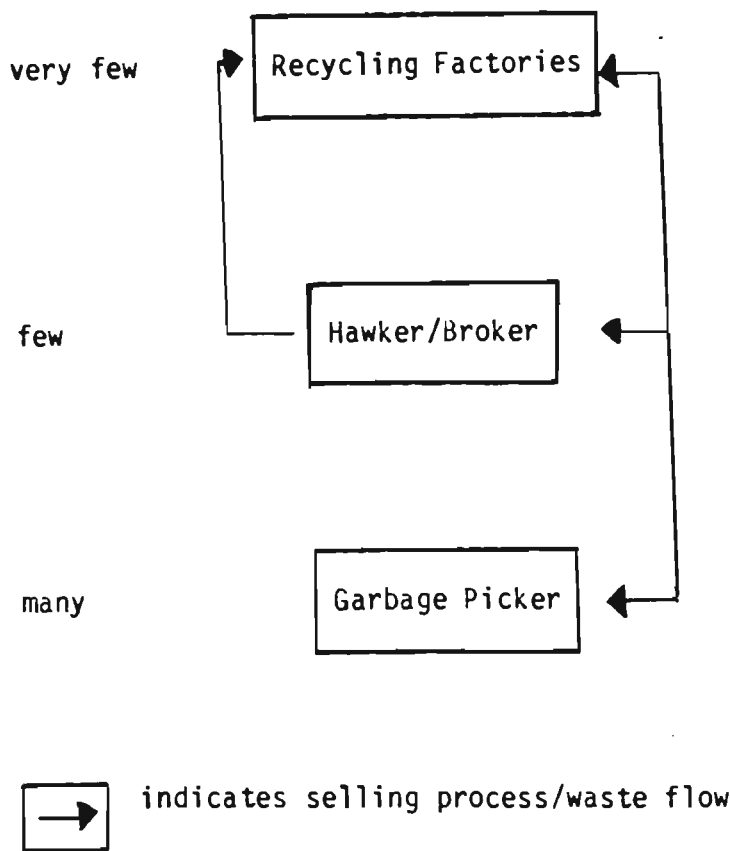
1. The percentages in Table 8.1 do not sum to 100 percent because the majority of pickers gave multi-responses and may have been picking more than one item. For example, a picker might collect paper, food, clothes as well as copper.
2. The category, "paper cardboard" also includes what the pickers refer to as "wall paper". These are sheets of printed cardboard with waterproof plastic lining used to make milk and fruit juice cartons. "Sails" refer to large sheets of black PVC (Poly Vinyl Chloride) Plastic.

pickers made of their pickings. In answer to this question 60,4 percent said that some items collected were used at home; 91,7 percent said they sold part or all of their collections and only 1 percent said they used the items found, to manufacture a product for sale (see p.103). Given the wide variety of products gathered from the dump the multiple use and subsequent profit made from the pickers' output is not surprising since this is clearly the approach that will enable the pickers to maximise his/her gains from picking.

8.2. Informal/Formal Sector Links

In the waste industry one finds that, not only is the removal and safe disposal of waste an important issue, but so also is the recycling of reclaimable or re-usable items. It became clear from this study that in metropolitan Durban, at least, the garbage pickers play an important role in this recycling process - particularly from the point of view of the sorting of the waste products discarded on the dumps. The pickers recycle waste in one or more of three ways by re-using the products collected themselves, by resorting and selling products to waste recycling firms in the formal economy and by resorting and selling to waste brokers or hawkers operating essentially in the informal sector. Figure 8.1 illustrates the alternative relationships possible between the garbage pickers and the other levels in the overall waste industry.

Figure 8.1 : Relationship Between the Garbage Picker and Dealers in Waste



As the diagram illustrates, the relationship tends to be a complicated one of co-operation and competition at all levels. Whilst the picker may need the broker to sell his/her collection at one level, at another, when the finds are valuable, it will pay the picker to bypass the broker and compete with him by approaching the recycling factory directly.

The pickers will collect waste, which they then sell to either hawkers/brokers or the recycling company, depending on who offers the the best price for the picker's collection. The hawkers/brokers are

often also members of the informal sector and represent a way in which the picker can move up the hierarchy in the industry. Some hawkers/brokers have managed to obtain the necessary licencing, and can, therefore, obtain formal contracts to salvage garbage from certain dumps. At both the Westville and the Pinetown dumps Indian hawkers/brokers had a contract to buy all the waste paper and plastic collected on the dump. Twenty pickers at Westville said that they collected plastic and paper for a hawker/broker (Mr. A) who bought their collections.

At the Pinetown dump an Indian businessman (Mr. B) has a contract with the Pinetown Municipality to salvage all garbage that can be used for recycling purposes. He has nine pickers who collect for him on a regular basis. These pickers are, however, not employed by him, because according to him, they do not possess the necessary passes and he is not prepared to run the risk of prosecution. Nonetheless these pickers work on a regular basis and are at least assured of a regular buyer.

Mr. B paid his pickers at the end of the week. They were paid R2 per bag of rubbish. These bags/sacks were provided by him and were approximately 1m² by 750mm high. A good picker fills up to 6 bags a day. Mr B. re-sells the plastic for an average of 22c per kg and paper at 6c per kg.

The pickers did however, also sell directly to large recycling

companies. They were unable to say who these recyclers were, but after contacting three large recycling companies in Durban, it was learnt that they do indeed buy from garbage pickers. Many pickers go to the company's branches and depots, where their garbage (in this case plastic and paper) is bought from them after it has been weighed.

Metal collected by pickers is sold to scrapyard owners as well as to recyclers and/or salvage companies. Copper is regarded as very valuable and is much sought after, since it can be sold at R1,20 per kg. Aluminium can be sold at 80c per kg.

From the above it is clear that links between the Informal Sector, as represented by the pickers, and the Formal Sector (recyclers and scrapyard owners) not only exist but are substantial. However, the relationship is not an equal one, to quote Davies;

"The informal sector, on the other hand, represents a subsidiary, peripheral and dependent mode of production, having to exist within a social formation it cannot directly influence. The informal sector's nature and existence depend on the formal sector. This is not to suggest that the informal sector is irrelevant to the formal;" (R. Davies:1979, 89).

Notwithstanding, the inherent inequality in the relationship, the fact remains that the recycler and picker are dependent on one another. The picker needs a buyer for his/her collection and the recycler obtains his raw material (paper, plastic, metal etc) either, directly from the picker or indirectly through dealing with the hawkers/brokers. However, as is shown in the Pinetown case the pickers are not usually formally employed by the hawker/broker. Consequently, even though they may well work for him on a regular basis, the outcome of this informal employment relationship is that the pickers have no security of employment. Nevertheless, many pickers have, in fact, been selling to, and picking for, the same recycler for several years.

The pickers perceive their activities to be 'working for themselves', and not withstanding the obvious dependent relationship that they have with the recyclers, some pickers even gave 'independence' as the reason why they liked picking as opposed to obtaining regular wage employment. Certainly, there are aspects of the work which do fit into the overall view of an independent occupation. The picker can decide whether or not to work, at what times to work, for how long a period to work, where to work and what to collect and it is these factors that probably create an illusion of independence. However, it must be remembered that the picker is, in fact, not truly independent but instead is firmly linked into the industrial system by his/her ultimate dependence on the recycler, or scrapyard owner for a market for the products of his/her labour. Consequently, as buyers, the picker is also affected by trends in the market.

If the steel industry, for example, is in a crisis so will the scrap metal collectors be. Likewise, if the demand for waste paper increases it is likely that they will be earning more (see Birkbeck, 1979:181).

The question arises as to why these pickers are not employed on a more permanent basis by the recyclers. The Pinetown dump - recycler's answer, regarding influx control measures, may be valid, and reflects the desperate situation the picker finds him/herself in. Under the influx control laws, which were in force at the time of the survey, if the picker did not possess a pass, he/she was virtually excluded from the formal labour market. Even in the informal job market the lack of a pass placed the picker in a more vulnerable economic position. Since he/she could not be formally employed, even though the result of his/her labour could be bought the relative bargaining strength of the picker vis a vis the hawker/broker or recycler was significantly undermined, as any alternative employment could only be sought in other sectors of the informal sector.

However, one must also accept that the lack of a pass could also provide the recycler with a convenient excuse for not employing pickers on a regular basis. The recycler can be expected to try to keep his costs as low as possible. Costs may be the reason for the present labour relationships since if the hawker/broker or recycler has to employ the pickers on a regular basis he would, in all likelihood, not only have to pay the picker more but also have to

take out some form of insurance to cover pickers against injuries sustained on the dumps. He may also be forced to provide some form of pension scheme and he would run the risk of labour organization among pickers. Consequently, quite apart from the issue of the pass, it may well be that it suits the recycler to make use of the present system whereby he buys waste from the picker on an informal basis. In this respect, it will be interesting to note what happens once the influx control laws have been repealed for some time, perhaps subsequent studies will show whether or not the recycler then employs the pickers?

Items other than those sold to the hawker/brokers and recyclers are sold among the pickers' neighbours in the formal townships or in the squatter areas. Wood (planks), 'sails' and 'wallpaper' were mostly sold to squatters as building material. Wallpaper was sold for about 50c per metre, the sheets being 1,25m wide. The food and clothing that was scavenged was usually for the picker's own use, but was also sold in some instances.

None of the pickers interviewed sold their wares from a shop or stall or even in a regular specified place, as some hawkers do. Some did, however, say that they sold from their homes to old customers, whilst others said that they sold their wares in the street to the passing public.

Only one picker said that he used the goods he collected in a

manufacturing process. This picker was a man who had been a carpenter before he became a picker. He collected mainly wood. He made doors, tables and chairs out of the planks and wood found on the dump, which he then sold to his neighbours.

The fact that nearly 92 percent of the pickers said that they sold at least part of their collections, clearly indicates that they form a segment of the monetised section of the informal sector. Although equally clearly, in terms of earnings and working conditions they will be right at the bottom of the job hierarchy.

8.3. Income Earned From Garbage Picking

The pickers were asked questions that directly pertained to the income they earned from garbage picking. Since the majority of pickers - 57,3 percent - who sold their collections, did so once a week, and those who were picking for recyclers were also paid per week, all the income figures given below will be given on a weekly basis.

The figures given in Table 8.2 show the distribution of the average weekly earnings of the scavengers who were interviewed.

On the basis of the data in Table 8.2 it is very clear that the earnings of the garbage pickers surveyed were extremely low. Only 2 percent earned over R40 per week, 85 percent earned R25 per week or

less and 50 percent earned R11,65 per week or less. The overall poverty situation becomes even worse when one adds to the low earning levels recorded in the survey, the fact that 69 percent of the pickers interviewed said that they were the sole breadwinner in their household. Taking the sub sample of the breadwinners only, only 10 percent earned more than R100 per month from their picking labours.

Table 8.2 :The Distribution of the Scavengers in Terms of the Usual Weekly Earnings of Garbage Pickers¹

'Usual' Weekly Earnings Amount	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percentage
R10 or less	42	43,8	43,8
R11 - 15	18	18,7	62,5
R16 - 25	22	22,9	85,4
R26 - 40	12	12,5	97,9
over R40	2	2,1	100,0
Total	96	100	

1. * The pickers' income, however, is not stable, and their earnings differ from one week to the next. There are distinct differences between what is usually earned (R15); what is earned during a "good" week (up to R60) and/or a "bad" week (as little as R5 is earned).

Of the twenty-nine pickers who said they picked mainly for recyclers, 45 percent earned on average R15 per week. Whilst the earnings of the others ranged from between R2 and R30 per week. Even though these pickers were not specifically asked whether they sold items elsewhere, in addition to the articles they sold to the recyclers, one can almost certainly assume that they did, particularly in view of the fact that 64,6 percent of all pickers said that they sold their wares to their neighbours as well as to people living in other black townships, 52 percent said that they sold to scrapyards and 8,3 percent said that they sold goods in squatter areas.

8.3.1 Earnings From Picking by Family Size

Table 8.3 contains data relating income levels to family size.

As is clear from the table 8.3, the pickers generally have large families to support - the average family size being 6 people. As was said earlier the earnings of families from picking were very low and most pickers (85,5 percent) earned less than R100 a month. When one compares this income level with the estimated 'minimum living level' income of an African family in Durban, which in September 1985 was R339,10 a month and, bears in mind the high proportion of pickers who said that their families had no other source of income, the data illustrates very dramatically the degree of poverty and hardship that the picker and his/her family faces (Institute of Planning Research, University of Port Elizabeth).

Table 8.3 : The Distribution of Earnings per week from Picking by Family Size

Income	Family Size			Total	Cumulative Percentage
	0 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 16		
	%	%	%	%	
R10 or less	21,0	17,7	5,2	43,9	43,9
R11 - 15	10,4	7,3	1,0	18,7	62,6
R16 - 25	8,3	10,4	4,2	22,9	85,5
R26 - 40	5,2	7,3	-	12,5	98,0
R40 +	1,0	1,0	-	2,0	100,0
Total	45,8	43,8	10,4	100	

N = 96

8.3.2 Earnings from Picking by Age of Picker

Table 8.4 below contains data relating the earnings from picking to the age of the picker.

Table 8.4 : The Distribution of Weekly Income from Picking by Age of Picker

Percentage of Sample in Category							
Weekly Earnings	0-10 yrs	11-20 yrs	21-30 yrs	31-40 yrs	41-50 yrs	51-60 yrs	60 + yrs
R 10 or less	1	12,0	9,5	13,0	3	3	3
R11-15	1	4,2	6,2	3,0	1	2	1
R16-25	-	7,3	9,4	3,0	2	1	-
R26-40	-	2,0	5,2	2,0	1	1	1
R40 +	-	1,0	-	-	-	-	1
Total	2	26,5	30,5	21,0	7	7	6

n = 96

The data show that there are no real differences in income earned between the different age groups. It does seem as though a small proportion of those in their twenties earn R10 per week or less, but overall the differences were not statistically significant.

8.3.3 Earnings From Picking by Sex of Picker

Table 8.5 contains data that relate weekly earning to the sex of the picker.

**Table 8.5 :The Distribution of Weekly Income
Earned by Sex**

Weekly Income Earned	Percentage of Sample in Category		
	Male	Female	Total
R10 or less	14,7	28,0	43,0
R11 - 15	9,4	9,4	19,0
R16 - 25	8,3	14,6	23,2
R26 - 40	8,3	4,2	12,5
Over R40	2,1	-	2,1
Total	43,2	56,8	100

N = 96

The sex of the picker does seem to have an influence on his or her earnings. Of the total number of pickers whose earnings were over R100 per month, 71 percent were men, whereas women comprised 61 percent of those who earned less than R100 per month.

The difference in earnings by sex may be due to the fact that the men tended to concentrate their efforts on collecting scrap metal and planks. These items were collected by 67 percent of the men as opposed to 33,3 percent of the women. Metal is a relatively high value collection item as it can be sold at a higher price than for example paper. Of those pickers who said that they collected and sold metal, none earned less than R16 per week and some earned more

than R40. Planks/wood are also commodities that can be sold at a higher price. These planks are often large and heavy, which is probably why women do not pick these items to the same extent. Sixty eight percent of the men said that they picked wood, where as only 32 percent of women fell into this category .

8.3.4 The Distribution of Earnings From Picking by the Education Level of the Picker

The data from the survey showed that the level of education reached by the picker did not significantly affect his/her income. This can be seen from the data given in Table 8.6 where a comparison between income earned and level of education of the picker is drawn.

Table 8.6 : The Distribution of Income by Level of Education of Picker

Weekly Income Earned	Educational Level Reached			
	Less than			
	Std. 3	Std. 3-5	Std. 6-8	Matric
R10 or less	13,5	16,7	12,5	1,0
R11 - 15	10,4	3,1	5,2	-
R16 - 25	7,3	6,3	8,3	1,0
R26 - 40	3,1	4,2	5,2	-
More Than R40	2,1	-	-	-
Column Total	36,4	30,3	31,2	2,0

n = 96

Earning levels below the average were found amongst all four

educational categories as indeed were those above the average. This suggests that education is not a significant determinant of the level of earnings amongst the garbage pickers and that one must look to other factors such as the length of time spent on the dumps, the age and sex of the pickers and the type of scavenging undertaken if one wants to identify the determinants of income levels in this sector.

8.3.5 Earnings by Length of Time in Occupation

One would intuitively expect that experience in picking would be positively related to the level of earnings, since pickers would learn by experience which items were the more valuable or high yield items, and would thus concentrate their activities on these items. To test this hypothesis the data relating earnings to time spent in the occupation is given in Table 8.7, and then analysed.

**Table 8.7: The Distribution of Average Earnings
by the Length of Time Spent Picking**

Weekly Income	Years Spent Picking				Percent of Total
	1-3yrs	4-6yrs	7-10yrs	Over 10 yrs	
	%	%	%	%	%
R10 or less	34,5	5,2	2,1	2,1	43,9
R11-15	17,7	-	1,0	-	18,7
R16-25	17,7	4,1	-	1,0	22,8
R26-40	12,5	-	-	-	22,8
Over 40	2,1	-	-	-	2,1
Total	84,5	9,3	3,1	3,1	100,0

n = 96

Rather surprisingly the data show that experience did not play a role in determining income levels. Not only had those who earn the most (between R26 and R40+), been picking for 1 to 3 years but also, the pickers who had been longest in the sector were concentrated in the low earnings categories and none of the pickers who had spent more than three years in the sector earned over R25 per week.

It is of course possible that the amount of time spent on the dumps is a more important determinant of income and is able to offset the gains from experience, i.e the less experienced pickers work longer hours. This is discussed in Section 8.3.6 below.

8.3.6 Earnings From Picking by Time Spent on the Dump

Data relating the average time spent picking per day to the picker's average weekly earnings are given in Table 8.8.

The data in Table 8.8 show the time a picker spends on the dump does not appear to really affect his income either. Most pickers (71 percent) spend between 7 and 10 hours a day, on the dump. However, 49 percent of them still earned less than R10 per week. Only two pickers said that they, on average, earned more than R40 a week and both said that they spend less than 5 hours a day picking. It is clear that the level of income earned must be more dependent on factors such as, the

nature of the item collected, the buyer, and how hard he/she works. Clearly, since daily deposits are made on the dumps, the picker's chances of picking up the more valuable items increase, not only with the number of hours per day spent on the dumps but, also with the number of days he or she spends picking. This is supported by the fact that those pickers who said that they did pick everyday seem to earn more, on average, than do than those who picked only once or twice a week.

Table 8.8 : Time Spent on Dumps by Weekly Income

Weekly Earnings	Average Time Spent Picking				Percent of Total
	1-3hrs	4-6hrs	7-10hrs	24hrs	
R10 or less	3,1	4,2	34,4	2,1	43,8
R11 - 15	4,2	1,3	13,5	-	19,0
R16 - 25	3,1	4,2	15,6	-	22,9
R26 - 40	2,1	3,1	7,3	-	12,8
Over 40	1,0	1,3	-	-	2,3
Total	13,5	13,1	70,8	2,1	100

n = 96

8.4 Earning Levels in Garbage Picking Relative to Other Informal Activities

Studies of the informal sector in general have shown that on average earning levels are low (Sethuraman, 1981). Studies undertaken relatively recently in the sector in the Greater Durban Area also confirmed these general findings and it is interesting to compare the income levels in the overall informal sector with those in garbage picking to see where the garbage pickers fit into the informal economic hierarchy of income and occupations (Nattrass and Glass, 1986; and Krige, 1985).

In a study of the informal sector in the Inanda and Clermont areas outside Durban it was found that hawking and artisanal activities were the lowest earning categories, whilst building and entertainment were the categories that offered the highest earning levels (Nattrass and Glass, 1986). Table 8.9 contains data comparing the distribution of earnings from hawking and artisanal work in the Inanda/Clermont study with those found in this study.

**Table 8.9 : The Relative Earnings of Garbage Pickers,
Hawkers and Informal Artisans in the Greater Durban Area**

Average Monthly Earnings	Percent in Earnings ⁽¹⁾ Category		
	Hawking	Artisans	Garbage Pickers
Less than R50	43	46	44
R50 - R100	40	21	42
More than R100	17	33	14
	n = 35	n = 28	n = 95

(1) Hawking and artisanal data from (Nattrass and Glass, 1986:57).

From this data in Table 8.9 it seems clear that the earning patterns of the garbage pickers are very similar to those found amongst the street traders interviewed in the Inanda informal settlement area. It appears that garbage picking, like hawking, is a sector that can be entered by those who lack the capital and know-how needed to enter the higher earning informal activities like building and small shop keeping. With regard to the artisanal activities, whilst those at the lower earning ends such as the broom and mat makers will be people in the same category, at the higher end of the spectrum, such as welding the opportunities are clearly better (Nattrass and Glass, 1986).

8.5 Conclusion

It is clear that garbage picking forms a part of the informal sector. Like many others in the informal sector, the pickers are involved in an economic activity without the necessary official sanction to do so. As a result they are subjected to persecution by authorities, and cannot claim the same rights as those working in the formal sector.

As an economic activity garbage picking offers very low returns in effect and is clearly an occupation that is entered into as a last resort by those who cannot for a variety of reasons find a more lucrative and physically attractive alternative. NB

CHAPTER 9

THE SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF GARBAGE PICKING

9.1 Working Conditions on the Dumps

As can be imagined the physical environment within which the pickers ply their trade is an extremely hazardous and unpleasant one. Working under such conditions will inevitably generate substantial stress which will be compounded by the low earnings and the general level of poverty in which the majority of the pickers have to subsist.

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Pickers interviewed were asked a number of questions relating to their attitudes to working on the dumps and from their answers, it became clear that they disliked the dirty conditions, the smell of the dumps, the danger inherent in the work from such things as broken glass, poisons discarded on the dump, rotten food, the weather conditions, the high risk of becoming ill, the attitudes of officials and the perception of their role held by the wider community.

9.2 The Reason for Choosing Scavenging as an Occupation

When one classifies an occupation as a survival or marginal occupation, one is inherently saying that people in that occupation have been forced into it through circumstances. They have been pushed

into the work by a lack of alternative opportunities and by their own desperation and not pulled towards the work, attracted by the earnings and the working conditions. However, to say that people may have been forced into an occupation is to say that they will necessarily perceive their situation in this manner. As was said earlier, individuals tend to rationalise a situation in which they find themselves as this is a way of enabling them to deal with the stress that is inherent in having no alternative course of action.

In answer to the question, "Why did you start doing this work?", 59 percent answered that they started scavenging in order to provide for the basic needs of their families: these needs were food, clothing, rent, etc. Other reasons given were as follows:

- scavenging because of unemployment: 23 percent.
- enable their children to go to school: 13,5 percent.
- retrenched from their previous jobs: 11 percent.
- no education and were, therefore, unemployed: 5 percent.
- no pass or permit to work in Durban; 7 percent.
- because of the valuable items they found on the dump: 7 percent

If one groups these answers in terms of whether they are a reflection of a perception by the picker of being pushed into the occupation rather than of personal choice, one finds that a substantial proportion of the pickers (46 percent) had a very realistic perception of their present job and they listed answers such as unemployment, retrenchment, lack of documentation and poor education and training

levels.

**Table 9.1 : Weekly Income by Stated Preference For
or Wage Employment**

Earnings per week	Percent of Pickers who Preferred		
	Wage Employment	Picking	No Response
Less than R10	39,3	47,4	2
R11 - R15	19,6	18,4	-
R16 - R25	21,4	26,3	-
R26 - R40	16,1	7,9	-
R40 +	-	-	-

n = 96

With such low average earning levels, poor working conditions and uncertainty one would expect pickers to be drawn to a regular wage paying job. Interestingly enough despite the obvious unattractive aspects of the job, 39,5 pickers said that they preferred picking to having a job. Surprisingly, 47 percent of these pickers earned less than R10 per week; 45 percent between R10 and R25 per week and only 8 percent earned more than R25 per week. Obviously income does not play an important role in this stated preference. A sense of independence and the value of items picked up were given by the picker as reasons for their preference. However, one must remember that, one cannot place too much emphasis on this type of response since people have strong tendencies to rationalise their existence in order to adjust to

the emotional stresses caused by unpleasant situations. An outcome of such a rationalisation would be the transformation of a situation of 'no choice' into one in which a choice was perceived to have been exercised - in other words pickers who felt that they had no chance of obtaining a wage job would say that they preferred picking.

The pickers were also asked what they liked about picking - the answers are listed below:

No comment	3
Provides them with basic	
Needs (food, clothes, shelter, etc.)	68
No one to cheat me	2
Do not need a permit	1
Independence	3
Can afford to send children to school	8
Nothing - no alternative	11
Extra income	2
Find valuable items	10
"People are kind" - group feeling	11

X. The bread and butter issue seems by far to be the most important, and is again a clear indicator of both the poverty of these pickers and their lack of alternative opportunities.

Scavenging is clearly one of the last resorts of the unemployed and is seen by the majority as a largely temporary measure. Pickers were asked whether or not they preferred scavenging to a regular wage job and their answers are tabulated in Table 9.1.

9.3 The Social Status of Scavenging

In general, pickers believed their social status to be very low. The pickers perceived themselves to be viewed with suspicion, ridiculed and despised by their community. Some of those interviewed said that they were accepted only because they could sell their goods cheaply. However, pickers did report that some people were sympathetic towards the pickers and often give them old clothes. Nine pickers said that they kept the fact that they picked a secret from the people they associate with.

9.4 Harassment of Pickers by the Authorities

From the answers obtained from pickers in the interview, it was also clear that pickers have to contend with continual harassment from police, municipal authorities and the waste company working the particular dump. The average fine imposed for picking was R20. Although only nine of the pickers interviewed had actually been fined, in reply to the question "What would you like to change about this job?", 29 pickers said that they would like the harassment to stop. Pickers felt that they should be allowed to pick on the dumps freely

and that the effect of the harassment was to prevent them from feeding their families.

From conversations with the pickers it appeared that when a rumour reached them that the police or the authorities would be visiting, the pickers simply left the dumps and, waited and watched from a safe distance away, until the police or authorities left the site. Should this happen without prior warning many pickers would simply run away and hide in the surrounding bush.

When questioned on what the attitudes of the police or the authorities were to picking, pickers said that they had been told the following:

1. You are stealing
2. You are not allowed to pick garbage
3. You are illegal, and do not have the right to be in the area
4. You are contravening the provisions of the Group Areas Act
5. You people cause trouble.

From interviews held with the Umhlanga and the Pinetown municipalities as well as with the managers of the Westville dump - Waste Tech - it was clear that the presence of pickers on the dumps was not desired. Indeed it was generally these authorities who, in an attempt to get rid of the pickers called in the police.

Amongst the reasons given by the authorities as to why pickers were not welcome on their dumps, were the following:

1. Huge tractors, with spoked wheels, are used to crush the garbage. Furthermore, bulldozers, as well as tipping lorries, are used on the dump continually throughout the day. It was feared that a picker might be injured or killed by these machines. This fear has a realistic basis since the researcher observed that the pickers swarm around the trucks, as they tip the garbage and, indeed, the interviewers were told that some pickers and employed workers had actually been injured. The municipalities and Waste Tech fear both the publicity and the possibility of a large insurance claim resulting from an accident.
2. The presence of pickers does not fit the image that the Westville dump managers - Waste-tech - want to bring across to the public. The dumps are also an unpleasant sight and attempts have been made on other garbage sites to hide the dump. Walls are built around the dump and flower gardens are made to beautify the spot. The presence of pickers makes the picture even more unattractive.
3. The health department is concerned about the health conditions found on the dump and regularly warns the pickers against poisons and diseases. As with police harassment, these warnings do not succeed in keeping pickers away.

In an attempt to stop picking, the strong measures that have been considered include the erection of electrified fencing and the use of coils of barbed wire around the dumps.

9.5 The Pickers' Working Day

Table 9.2 contains data showing the distribution of pickers by time usually spent per day on the dump.

Table 9.2. : Hours Spent on Dump

Hours	Number of Pickers	Percent or Total
1 - 3 hrs	13	13,5
4 - 6 hrs	13	13,5
7 - 10 hrs	68	70,9
24 hrs	2	2,1
Total	96	100,0

Most pickers (70 percent) spent between 7 and 10 hours a day on the dumps. Two pickers spent 24 hours on the dump, which signifies that they live/sleep in the bush around the actual dump. The rest of the pickers spent between one and six hours on the dump. Most pickers said that they picked every day (42 percent) or twice a week (6,3 percent). Forty pickers did not respond to this question.

Pickers of all ages pick between seven and ten hours a day and, equally, pickers who said that they only picked 1 to 3 hours a day, varied in age from under 10 to 50 years.

Women, on average, put in a longer working day than the men on the dumps. The data is given in Table 9.3 below.

Table 9.3 : Hours Spent on Dump by Sex

Sex Category	Time Spent on Dump				Total
	1-3 hrs	4-6 hrs	7-10 hrs	24 hrs	
	%	%	%	%	%
Male	24,4	26,8	43,9	4,9	43
Female	3,7	5,7	92,6	-	57
Total	13,5	13,5	70,9	2,1	100

By far the majority (93 percent) of the women scavengers said that they picked from between 7 and 10 hours a day. However, amongst the men, only 44 percent picked for the same length of time. More men than women spent less than seven hours on the dump.

Pickers were asked whether or not they had assistance with their picking. Only 7,3 percent of the pickers replied that they had someone who helped them pick. These helpers were temporary. Only two

helpers were related to the picker and they were not paid.

A way in which the labour time expended on the dumps could be more efficiently utilised, would be for the pickers to combine together in groups as this would have the dual effect of allowing the pickers to benefit from large collections, thus strengthening their bargaining position vis a vis the hawker/brokers and the waste recycling companies. When questioned on this aspect 25 pickers (26 percent) said that they did collect in groups, 20 of them being the group from Westville who sold plastic to the Indian businessman on a regular basis. Those pickers working in groups did not, however, swop items within the group (in fact, none of the pickers swop items). It seems then that, even when the pickers do pick in groups to a limited extent, they do so under conditions which effectively nullify any benefits that they might have been able to reap by co-operation with one another.

As far as could be ascertained the pickers did not have to pay anyone to gain access to the dumps. Although, since bribery is illegal, this question may not have been accurately answered.

The majority of the pickers interviewed said that they walked to the dumps (75 percent). Of the remainder, 19 percent made use of a bus to get to the dump, 3 percent used the train and the balance made use of other means of transportation. Collections were transported in the same manner, except that more pickers made use of a bus when

transporting the garbage. It cost the pickers between R3 and R14 a week to get to the dumps and back.

9.6 Conclusion

Garbage pickers seem to have a realistic perception of the niche they occupy in the wider social framework - a niche that is clearly amongst the lowest and one which provides people who are otherwise largely excluded from wage employment with a means of providing for the continued survival of themselves and their dependents.

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CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

10.1 Summary of Major Findings

The results of the survey conducted amongst Durban's garbage pickers clearly outlines the conditions under which the pickers work. These conditions are physically unpleasant (dirt and smell) and hazardous and the work is poorly rewarded. The average income earned by the pickers is not very high. Pickers feel that they are despised by their communities and they are harassed and fined by police. Bearing all these aspects in mind, the question arises as to why these people are prepared to do this work. The only answer would appear to be that these people have no alternate means with which to ensure their continued survival.

Most pickers are drawn from the ranks of the otherwise unemployed. They are poor, have large families to support, often with no-one else to supplement the family income, and they are quite desperate. The degree of desperation can be gauged from the fact that they eat food that they find on the dumps.

Notwithstanding the overall unattractiveness of garbage picking as an occupation, if the economic recession currently being experienced by the country continues, the number of people who are forced to live off the garbage dumps is likely to increase as more people become

jobless. It has been argued that the informal sector, as a whole, largely consists of those people who cannot find employment elsewhere - those who are often referred to as the 'labour reserve army'. These people could theoretically obtain work in the formal sector but because of a scarcity of jobs have turned to the informal sector as a temporary means of survival (Nattrass, N.J., 1984; Wellings and Sutcliffe, 1984). Whether this view is correct for the sector as a whole may be open to doubt. However, as far as this study is concerned, garbage picking clearly forms part of this overall view of the sector. NO

The majority of the pickers who were interviewed stated that they hoped to find formal employment as soon as conditions improve in the formal labour market. Most of the interviewees said that they were currently actively seeking wage employment and would cease scavenging as soon as they were successful in their job search. It seems clear that, in going into garbage picking, these people had adopted what Wilkinson and Webster have called "a fall back strategy" which as these analysts point out;

"becomes a necessary substitute for the social security benefits that the state has failed to provide" (Wilkinson and Webster, 1982:8).

The garbage pickers, themselves, clearly, regard their work as being temporary in nature. Their decision not to continue working on the NO

dumps on a permanent basis is based on a number of different factors, the most often cited being various aspects of the physical conditions under which they work the garbage dumps. Whether or not their current intention of leaving the dumps will ever become a reality will largely depend upon the economy's capacity to create wage employment on a large scale. At present the outlook for job creation in South Africa looks very bleak. Given the extremely disadvantaged position that the garbage pickers occupy in the job market, their prospects of being successful in finding a regular wage job are very poor. Indeed, it seems that the maximum likelihood scenario for the future of the majority of the scavengers is that they will be forced through lack of opportunity, either to continue in their present occupation or to move to another 'fall back strategy' such as 'street trading'.

If, as seems virtually certain, the pickers are destined to spend a significant portion of their working lives in their present occupation, a sensible approach, at least in the short to medium term, would be one that seeks to improve the lot of the individual picker in terms of his/her earning capacity and the conditions under which he/she works. The earning capacity of a picker is a function of both the nature of the exact occupation he occupies and the efficiency/productivity with which the job is performed.

One way in which an individual could successfully improve his earning capacity is through upward mobility. However, in the waste industry

as it is presently organised, the opportunities for upward mobility are limited. There is a possibility that a limited number of pickers could become garbage hawkers/brokers. However, such a transition is not simple. A picker, seeking to become a broker, not only has to have sufficient education and training to handle the marketing side of the business but also must be able to raise enough capital to finance the purchase of a truck and to pay the wages of the people whom he/she will have to employ.

In terms of the average earnings of the pickers in this survey, it is obvious that it is virtually impossible for the majority to save sufficient funds to finance their job advancement from their present incomes. Equally, their lack of education and of any formal security prohibits them from obtaining loan capital from the formal financial institutions.

The pickers seem well aware of the extremely limited opportunities for advancement in garbage picking. Indeed, in the course of the interviews, the author did not get the impression that the pickers were interested in, or were even aware of the possibilities of improving their position within the informal sector. The pickers appeared to regard obtaining a formal sector job as being the only real way out of their present situation. The garbage pickers interviewed could not be classified as to be incipient capitalists in any sense of the word, nor did they come across to the interviewer, as petty merchant capitalists. Indeed, the likelihood of the garbage picker entering the formal sector of the economy in this way seemed

very small.

Since no particular skills appeared to be necessary to enter this segment of the informal sector, nor, indeed, did a lack of sufficient capital or the presence of any technological barriers to entry seem to pose a problem to any would be new entrants to the sector, the sector could and, indeed, did attract people who were wholly unable to find any other form of maintaining themselves.

yes

However, there were a number of problems posed to pickers and would be pickers by certain institutional barriers to entry into the occupation. On the dumps, in this study, people were not officially permitted to scavage and, consequently, the pickers who were there were under a constant threat from police or municipal action.

As far as the pickers themselves were concerned, the study highlighted the following demographic characteristics:

1. No one sex was found to be dominant
2. The majority of the pickers were young, with the modal age being between the ages of twenty and thirty
3. Most pickers were unmarried
4. The mean family size of the pickers was 6

5. Most pickers were the sole breadwinner in the family

Educationally the pickers were poorly educated. Most pickers being only functionally literate. Very few pickers had either any technical or artistic skills or had previously practiced a trade.

On average, pickers earned very little. In fact, the study revealed very clearly that the majority of pickers lived in conditions that can only be described as destitution. The majority of pickers earned R10 or less per week.

When one compares the findings of the Durban study of the garbage pickers with those of a similar study undertaken in Cali, (Colombia) by Chris Birkbeck one finds very similar results. Indeed, the following passage quoted from Birkbeck could equally well have been written as a description of the Durban pickers;

"Garbage pickers are part of a recycling network, which feeds some large factories and a few small industries in Cali and elsewhere. Materials such as paper, bottles, scrap metal and bone are collected either on the dump or elsewhere, and sold to a series of dealers who eventually sell them to industrial consumers. Garbage pickers are not the only recyclers in Cali, for there are some large-scale, capital-intensive companies

which are also in the same business, but the majority of recuperated materials still appears to come from the garbage pickers. Because of the nature of their relationship with the industrial market for recuperated materials, the garbage pickers in effect work for the factories but are not employed by them. They may be in the position to decide when to work and when not to, but the critical factor is control over the prices of recuperated materials, and that control very definitely lies with the industrial consumers" (Birkbeck, 1978:1174).

Nor, indeed, are the findings in contradiction with those from studies undertaken on the informal sector as a whole. The following quotation from Davies referring to the informal sector is also applicable to the garbage sub-sector:

"The foregoing description of the characteristics of the informal sector demonstrates the relationship of subordination/domination between it and the formal sector. The nature of the former is in large measure determined by the impact of the latter upon it "(Davies, 1979:93).

Indeed, to return to a quotation from Birkbeck used in the opening chapter of this study, it seems very clear that in Durban too;

".....garbage pickers are a hopelessly poverty-stricken group who are scratching out a meagre existence from the crumbs of the richer man's table" (Birkbeck, 1979: 161).

Since the garbage picker is both a member of the waste industry and the wider informal sector, the conditions in which he operates, to a significant degree, are circumscribed by the conditions prevailing in both the industry itself and the economy as a whole.

Consequently, before making any recommendations designed to improve either the working conditions of the picker, or the general situation that he/she is faced with, it is important to take a brief look at the waste industry itself and how it operates.

10.2 The Dynamics of the Waste Industry

With the increasing awareness of the necessity to conserve our natural resources, more attention has in recent years been paid to conservation of the environment as well as to the ways by which materials that have been used and discarded can be recycled for re-use. The recycling of waste materials has become very popular during

the last decade or so, and is now a world wide phenomena. Methods used to recycle waste and to produce new goods made from the recycled material vary greatly depending on the technology used. For example, in Japan, hardly any waste material is left unrecycled. Thermal energy, organic compost and material for landfill projects are produced from waste material, among other things. Even materials not suitable for recycling into specific products are used. They are buried in large sunken fields and serve as the base for farmland reclamation projects (Shimizu, 1984:91).

To provide the most economically efficient treatment and utilisation of waste materials it is necessary to sort and separate the waste materials into a number of different categories before it is collected for recycling. In developed countries this is often done through the co-operation of the country's citizens who will separate waste collected in their homes or offices into the different categories before delivering it as garbage. Alternatively, the waste is separated by means of the use of sophisticated, capital intensive machinery. Where recycling efforts are widespread only the waste not suitable for recycling purposes is finally dumped and this means that because less waste is dumped, less land is used for this purpose and the potential for pollution is reduced.

However, in most LDC's this separation is done after the garbage has been collected and is often done on site on the dumps themselves - as indeed it is in South Africa. The separation is largely done by garbage pickers who work in conditions similar to the ones described

in this study. There is a need to upgrade these conditions but, to achieve this, as a first step, it will be necessary to intervene in the waste industry, itself, with the intention of making the industry's internal dynamics more compatible with the provision of better wages and working conditions for the individual pickers.

There is also a trend emerging in South Africa towards the increased recycling of garbage and this offers an opportunity to re-organise the waste industry in a way that will improve the lot of the garbage pickers. An interesting innovation has been tried in the Johannesburg area. It is essentially an exercise in garbage separation and is known locally as the 'Robinson Deep Experiment'. The idea is that, once collected, the garbage will be delivered to a sorting station and dumped onto large conveyor belts situated in a factory-like building. Individual pickers are employed on a full time basis to sort the garbage passing their work stations on the conveyor belt. The sorted garbage is then sold to recyclers and only the unusable waste reaches the garbage dump.

This approach has a number of attractive features. Not only does it make use of physical resources that would otherwise be lost to the economy, but it also offers a framework within which the garbage pickers can be offered security of employment, both in terms of wages and of improved working conditions. It is, however, a relatively capital intensive approach to garbage separation and, consequently, will not be replicable on a large scale. Also whilst, undoubtedly the productivity and earnings of the pickers who get jobs on the sorting

belts will improve, the number of pickers who will be needed to sort the garbage will be smaller and, consequently, the survival opportunities at present provided by the industry will be reduced.

A similar but very much less sophisticated approach is presently being investigated by the Pretoria municipality. This project consists of only a large narrow concrete slab onto which the garbage is dumped prior to being separated by employed pickers.

In a country like South Africa where, at present, great emphasis is being placed on the need for job creation to overcome unemployment, a garbage source separation scheme such as the Pretoria experiment, which is labour intensive rather than capital intensive could make a useful contribution - particularly as it will improve the work opportunities and conditions at the very bottom of the job ladder, i.e. where the improvement is most urgently needed.

The question arises as to exactly how these improved methods of waste separation would benefit the picker. The obvious answer is that the pickers will be incorporated into the formal wage labour market. They will benefit from the assurance of a regular income as well as from better working conditions, through the provision of such things as heavy duty gloves, medical aid and protection against disease and injuries - all things that, at present, represent some of the pickers' main problems.

On the other hand, the introduction of a formally organised method of waste separation will only benefit those pickers who are lucky enough to be employed in this way. The number of pickers allowed on the dump could be effectively limited by the introduction of sorting. In other words whilst those who keep their jobs will be better off than those who are not so fortunate, a "last resort" for the unemployed could be removed.

An alternative approach would be to allow picking to take place freely on the dumps, after the formal garbage deliveries have been made. This approach is used, to a limited extent, on the Springfield dump near Durban. In this case pickers are allowed to pick freely between 4 and 6 pm, i.e. after the garbage handling machines have stopped working but before the gates are locked. Clearly, 2 hours per day is too little to optimise the use of these dumps, but there seems no real reason why the picking period could not be extended - even throughout the night.

However, no matter what approach the authorities take to waste disposal and recycling, it must be appreciated that, from a work point, garbage picking is never likely to be a high earning occupation. Garbage pickers, in general, are not and are never likely to become infant capitalists. However, garbage picking is an essential niche in the economic hierarchy and it should be clearly recognised as such.

Whilst garbage picking does not, in general, provide opportunities to earn high incomes, it does provide a haven for the unemployed and often stands as their only bulwark between starvation and survival!

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APPENDIX

SURVEY REGARDING GARBAGE PICKING

We are from the university of Natal and are doing a study to find out more about the people who pick the cities ^{ys}garbage dumps. To do this we would like to ask you some questions about yourself and the work you do. We have permission from the authorities to do this. All the information you give us will be regarded as confidential and private. We'll appreciate it if you could give us half an hour of your time. Thank you.

Name of Dump:

No. of person interviewed:

Interviewer:

Date:

GENERAL

1) Where do you live?

2) Where were you born?

Rural Area
Durban Area

1
2

3) If born in a rural area; when did you move to Durban?

Less than 6 months ago
6 - 1 year
1 - 2 years
2 - 3 years
3 - 4 years
More than 4 years ago

1
2
3
4
5
6

4) Are you the only one in your family bringing in money?

yes
no

1
2

5) If no, who else earns money in your family?

Husband
Child
Live-in Relative

1
2
3

6) Where does he/she work?

7) Does he/she earn a regular salary?

yes
no

1
2

8) How big is your family?

--

9) Did you go to school?

yes
no

1
2

10) If yes, how long were you at school?

Less than Std 3
Std 3 - 5
Std 6
Std 8
Matric

1
2
3
4
5

GARBAGE PICKING

11) Why did you start doing this kind of work? ✓

--

12) How long have you been doing this kind of work? ✓

Months

Years

13) Does any other member of your family do this type of work? ✓

yes
no

1
2

14) What do you collect? ✓

1	2
yes	no

paper/cardboard	<input type="checkbox"/>
bottles	<input type="checkbox"/>
metal	<input type="checkbox"/>
plastic	<input type="checkbox"/>
cloth/clothes	<input type="checkbox"/>
organic/food	<input type="checkbox"/>
wood	<input type="checkbox"/>
other (specify) _____	

16) What do you do with your collection?

1	2
yes	no

Own use	<input type="checkbox"/>
sell	<input type="checkbox"/>
manufacture	<input type="checkbox"/>
other (specify) _____	

16 a) If you sell, where do you sell?

_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

b) To whom do you sell?

_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

c) How often do you sell?

every day	<input type="checkbox"/>
once a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
twice a week	<input type="checkbox"/>
twice a month	<input type="checkbox"/>
once a month	<input type="checkbox"/>
less frequently	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>

17 a) If, you manufacture, what do you manufacture?

b) Where do you manufacture/work? ✓

c) What do you do with what you have manufactured?

d) If you sell, where do you sell it?

(e) How often do you sell?

- Every day
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- Twice a month
- Once a month
- Less often

1

2

3

4

5

6

18) Where do you collect?

19) How often do you collect?

- Every day 1
- Twice a week 2
- Once a week 3
- More often (specify) 4
- Less often (specify) 5

20) How much time do you spend on the dumps? ✓

Hours per day +-

21) Do you have anyone helping you? ✓

- yes 1
- no 2

a) If yes, do they help you on a ✓
regular basis 1
temporary basis 2

b) How old is he/she? +-

c) Is the person helping you related to you? ✓

- 1 2
- yes no

- sister 1
- brother 2
- child 3
- cousin 4
- other (Specify) 5

d) Do you pay the person helping you? ✓

- yes
- no

22) Do you collect in groups?

yes
no

1
2

23) How big is the group?

--

24) Do you swop your pickings for anything?

yes
no

25) Did you have to pay anyone to be able/allowed to work here? ✓

yes
no

a) If yes, do you still pay?

yes
no

b) Who did you have to pay? ✓

c) How much do you pay? ✓

--

26) Do you do this type of work for someone else? ✓

yes
no

a) If yes how much do you get paid? ✓

R

--

per week
per month
per day

1
2
3

b) Do you get paid in kind?

yes
no

INCOME

27) How much do you usually earn? ✓

per week

R

per month

R

28) What did you earn in a good week? ✓

R

29) What did you earn in a bad week? ✓

R

30) Does your income often change?

yes

no

1
2

TRANSPORT

31) How do you get to the dumps? ✓

walk

taxi

train

bus

own car

someone else's car

other (specify)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

--

32) How do you transport your collections? ✓

walk

taxi

train

bus

own car

someone else's car

other(specify)

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

--

33) How much does it cost you to get to the dumps and back? ✓

R

--

EMPLOYMENT

34) Do you have another job? ✓

yes
no

1
2

35) If yes, what is it? ✓

36) If no, when was the last time you had a steady paying job? ✓

6 months ago
1 year ago
longer ago
more recent
Never

1
2
3
4
5

37) What was the last job you had? ✓

38) How much did you get paid at that job? _____

39) Why did you leave that job? ✓

40) Are you looking for another job? ✓

yes
no

1
2

41) Would you like to go back to a regular paid job? ✓

yes
no

1
2

GENERAL ATTITUDE ABOUT GARBAGE PICKING AND DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

42) Sex:

Male
Female

1
2

43) Age:

--

44) Marital Status:

Single
Married
Living together
Widowed
Divorced

1
2
3
4
5

45) How many children do you have?

--

46) Do you live with your family?

yes
no

1
2

47) If no, where does your family live?

48) Tell me more about this kind of work you do:

a) What do you like about this work? ✓

b) What do you dislike about this work? ✓

(Only ask those who do not pick for someone else)

49) Would you rather do this kind of work than working for someone else? ✓

yes
no

1
2

50) Why? ✓

51) What would you like to change about this work? ✓

52) What is your greatest problem in doing this kind of work? ✓

53) How do the people in your community view your type of work? ✓

(Probe : for example) : Do they like it?
They do not like it?
Would they also like to do this kind of work?
They do not regard it as work?

54) Do people try to chase you away from this work?

yes

no

1

2

55) Who does this? ✓

1

2

yes

no

The police

the municipality

other authorities

56) What do they say? _____

57) Have you been fined for doing this work? ✓ _____

CITY OF

CITY ENGINEER'S DEPARTMENT



DURBAN

D.C. MACLEOD, PR. ENG.
CITY ENGINEER
STADSINGENIEUR

DIE STAD

STADSINGENIEUR SE DEPARTEMENT

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22 AUG 1985

Professor Jill Nattrass
University of Natal
King George V Avenue
DURBAN
4001

Dear Professor Nattrass

BISASAR ROAD SOLID WASTE DISPOSAL SITE

Your letter dated 13 August 1985 refers.

Scavenging on the City's Disposal Site is not authorised or permitted during normal disposal operations. It will therefore not be possible to authorise your research team to study the "garbage dump pickers".

It is realised that a certain amount of unauthorised "picking" takes place after normal working hours. This is extremely difficult to prevent without incurring considerable expense.

Should you wish to pursue this research project, it is suggested that your researchers approach these people when they have left the site.

Yours faithfully

R. T. Hardy
CITY ENGINEER
for.