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ENVIRONMENT

Waste management has more to give the economy

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SOUTH Africa's waste management sector has been overlooked as a contributor to the country's economy. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) found that the sector has an estimated turnover of at least R15.3 billion per annum.

It is a sector that has grown vastly due to private and public sector investment. Additional contributors to its growth have been the adoption and use of environmentally-friendly waste management across the country, which has contributed to the government's plans to cut the country's CO2 emissions.

The CSIR found that through land-filling, the estimated value was more than R17 billion annually. They predicted that the sector could double its growth through more private-public partnerships and improved municipal support.

"From the government's perspective, it should be around the complete sector of organic waste. That could be the waste you find in your fruit and vegetables, waste that is from the parks and homes," said Asiphile Khanyile, groundWork UMI Waste Project campaigner.

According to the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (Gaia), waste management was identified as one of the three sectors with the largest potential to reduce a rise in temperature in the next two decades.

Khanyile explained that a large proportion of waste disposed of in landfills creates dangerous amounts of methane gas. At least 25% of today's global warming is driven by methane from human action and waste disposal.

More countries have begun to shift their actions from decreasing the use of landfills and incinerators for waste to creating innovative zero-waste solutions with environmental and economic benefits. In South Africa, the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Environmental Affairs' (DFFE) proposals to further address waste management have outlined strategies through



WASTE Pickers wait for a truck to dump garbage at the Matiki landfill site before they can start foraging. | BHEKIKHAYA MABASO African News Agency (ANA)

their national Water Management Plan and its Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).

While both strategies suggested management solutions to decrease illegal dumping and waste disposal, the proposal did not discuss detailed solutions address environmental jus-

tice issues, gender equity and informal workers in the sector. These aspects contribute greatly to the environmental consequences of waste management.

Khanyile said that much of the integrated waste management system relied on informal workers and

wider access to to address the circular economy of waste management. In the public sphere, the DFFE's revised National Waste Management Strategy has been emphasising methods such as a circular economy and through awareness campaigns in communities.

At the May 2022 launch of the

National Waste Management Fleet in Limpopo, DFFE Minister Barbara Creecy pushed for national and provincial government support to municipalities to develop inclusive and effective integrated waste management strategies.

"We must ensure our landfills comply with the regulatory environment and waste does not leach into groundwater or the soil... and every year we must ensure more and more homes have access to safe waste disposal," Creecy said.

In the private sector, there have been both private-public partnerships and fully private-funded campaigns integrating sustainable waste management solutions. In KwaZulu-Natal, the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology, groundWork and Asiye eLafuveni have created the Warwick Zero Waste Project.

The Warwick Zero Waste Project is a collaborative three-year initiative to create a zero-waste to landfill case study for large-scale informal marketplaces, predominantly in Africa. Started in 2021, Khanyile said the project worked closely with informal workers (informal traders, street vendors and waste pickers).

This collaboration aimed to provide innovative zero-waste models for cities across the continent and internationally and contributes to climate change mitigation.

In the private sector, Nestlé's East and Southern Africa Region (ESAR) joined forces with a tech start-up called Kudoti, a waste buy-back centre called Destination Green, and waste reclaimers from Tembisa to create a waste management initiative.

Corporate communications and public affairs director at Nestlé ESAR, Saint-Francis Tohlang said: "Tackling waste management in communities requires strong partnerships, innovation and actionable efforts that deliver tangible impact. Through re-Imagine Tomorrow's data collection, training, and incentive scheme, we are demonstrating how to rethink, reduce, and repurpose can be entrenched in our daily lives to improve waste management and safeguard our environment."