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## Green jobs initiative in Burkina Faso: From waste to wages

Among the goals of the ILO's new "Green Jobs Initiative" is linking development and job creation to the creation of a cleaner, more sustainable environment. Though the concept is relatively new, the practice is already growing in some parts of the world. ILO Online reports from Burkina Faso where a new project for removing plastic waste is not only improving the environment, but creating "green jobs" in the process.

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**OUAGADOUGOU, Burkina Faso (ILO Online)** – When Italian environmental scientist Andrea Micconi first encountered a mountain of plastic waste here, he was surprised to learn that in addition to destroying the land it was even killing local cows.

Now, his project to clean up plastic waste is not only saving the lives of cows and cleaning up the city, but helping create new "green jobs" that provide people working to make the environment cleaner and more sustainable with jobs and income as well.

"Twenty thousand tons of plastic trash are chaotically scattered around Ouagadougou each year, not only by people, but also by seasonal rain and winds", says Mr. Micconi who works with the International Lay Volunteers Association (LVIA) here.

"The locals do not realize that 30 per cent of their livestock die because of accidentally swallowing plastic. No wonder the Burkinabe are struggling, both economically and socially. But if people have an incentive to collect and recycle plastic trash, the environmental situation can be improved more quickly", he adds.

That is precisely where Mr. Micconi focused his attention in 2003, when he enrolled in the Master's course on Management of Development – run by the ILO Training Centre of Turin, Italy. This course gives participants a sound foundation in project design by combining legal, economic, social and environmental aspects into an integrated cycle.

During his course, Mr. Micconi designed a project proposal entitled "Protecting the environment: profiting from garbage in Burkina Faso", where he introduced a self-sustaining, market-oriented solution. In fact, despite major investments, previous attempts in Burkina Faso and other countries of the Sahel had failed because of conflicts of interest between the private and public sectors and because they were not really involving local communities.

"That's why we started by organizing public awareness campaigns to alert people on the risks and dangers of plastic waste and introduce them to the very notion and benefits of recycling", Mr. Micconi says. "They would then be persuaded to go around the city and countryside to collect plastic rubbish, which they can sell for profit to the first recycling centre in the country."

"Here, it would be re-processed into material to be sold to enterprises to make chairs, tubes, school equipment, etc., thus creating new sources of revenue for the poor." The project was so convincing that in 2003, the World Bank's Development Marketplace – a programme which identifies and supports innovative development ideas – awarded Mr. Micconi a prize of US\$ 148,400 that allowed him to start works immediately.

Drawing on a similar experience in Senegal, in 2004 Ouagadougou's first ever recycling centre was built and is now fully operational. It uses local resources, and appropriate technology that can be understood even where literacy levels are low.

The recycling centre is managed by 30 women and two technicians (all locals) working eight hours a day on a five days week, and earning the equivalent of 50 euros per month – a good salary compared to a Burkinabe teacher who earns 35 euros. The almost 2000 locals collecting waste earn up to 0.80 euros per day.

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Soon after, the Waste Management Department of the Municipality of Ouagadougou, local authorities, organizations and enterprises decided to join the project.

“By bringing together the public and private sectors in a joint initiative, we could ensure service improvement for the population, as well as business growth”, explains Mr. Micconi. What is more, thanks to an official twinning agreement between the city of Ouagadougou and the city of Turin in Italy signed in 2003, and a decentralized cooperation programme in West Africa run by the Piedmont Region, the Italian Government also decided to offer relevant financial and technical assistance.

Today, the environmental situation has improved noticeably; the city and its suburbs are cleaner. On the other side, many locals now manage to secure some income, either by collecting the plastic waste or by working as full-time employees at the recycling centre. Many of them used to be among the poorest of Ouagadougou’s suburban population.

In fact, the association of local women now runs the centre independently, and they earned around US\$ 35,000 revenues in 2006; two thirds of which will be used for salaries and the rest for maintenance costs and amortization.