

# Turning Livelihoods to rubbish? Impacts of Formalization, Financialization and technologization of Waste Management in the Urban Poor

*Increased value participation for small and informal actors through the establishment of governmental policies -The case of e-waste in South Africa*

*Observations & preliminary results from field phase*

WORKSHOP | UNIVERSITY OF COLOGNE



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From Trash to Treasure?

E-Waste Economies in Global and Local Perspective

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Participation is by invitation only.  
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Image 1: Establishment of a multidisciplinary research group



Image 2: University of Cologne

Romance Philology  
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# Research Gap

“Earlier research on e-waste processing has largely failed to take into account the conceptual foundations of the informal sector, although it has been acknowledged to be an important aspect (Chi *et al.*, 2011; Ongondo *et al.*, 2011). (...) considering the theoretical underpinnings of the informal sector enriches the GPN approach in that it reveals the broader systemic tendencies in current capitalist production” (Laha 2014: 310ff.)

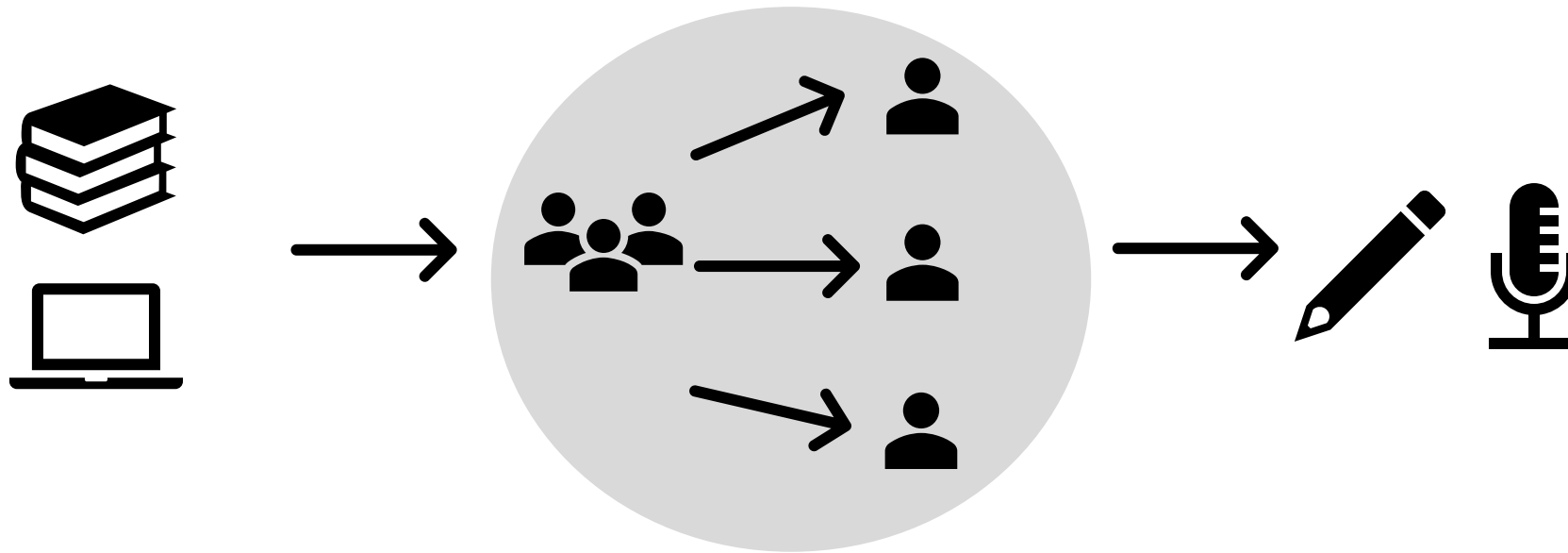
## The case of South Africa

“The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) has gazetted its intent to call for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in (...) waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) (...) through the development and implementation of Industry Waste Management Plans. EPR is an advanced policy instrument, implemented widely in developed countries, aimed at shifting the responsibility (financial and operational) (...)for the management of certain waste streams from government, typically municipalities, to producers. A crucial aspect that government, business and academia must consider in designing and implementing these EPR schemes for South Africa, is the existing *informal* sector, a very active, but still largely marginalized community of waste pickers. (Godfrey *et al.* 2016: 1).

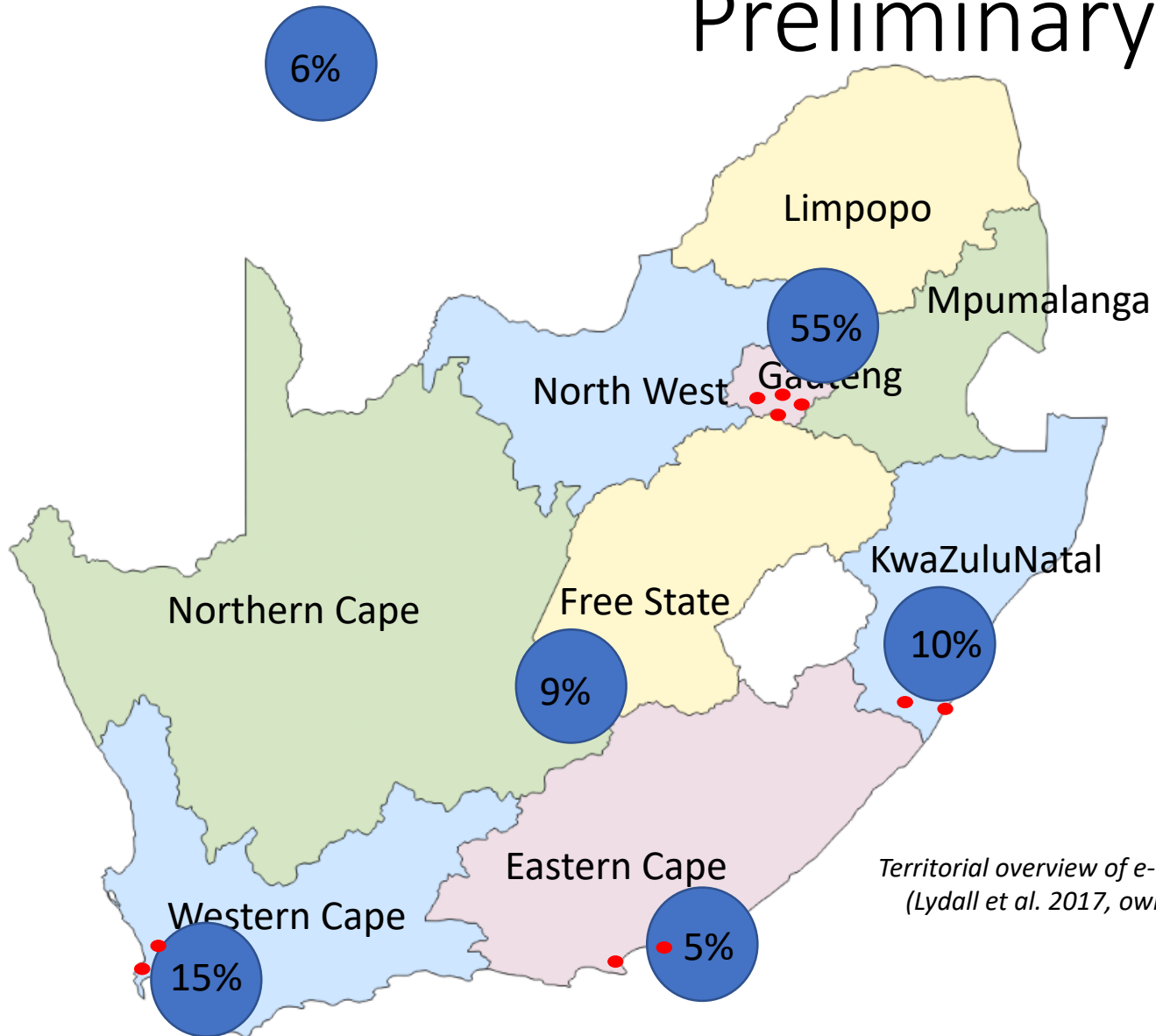
# Research Objectives

- Structure of the South African e-waste value chain – overview of value creation
- Differences in value creation by formal and informal actors
- Disadvantages for informal and formal actors through missing or private policies
- Alternatives for a more equal value participation → Can this lead to spill-over effects for the whole South African Economy?

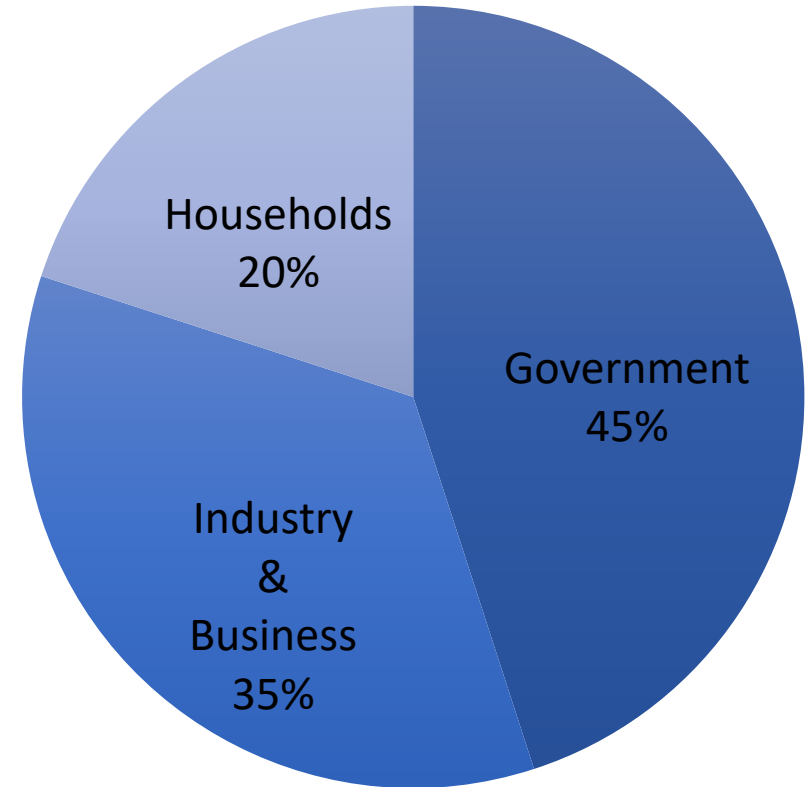
# Methods & Field phase



# Preliminary Results



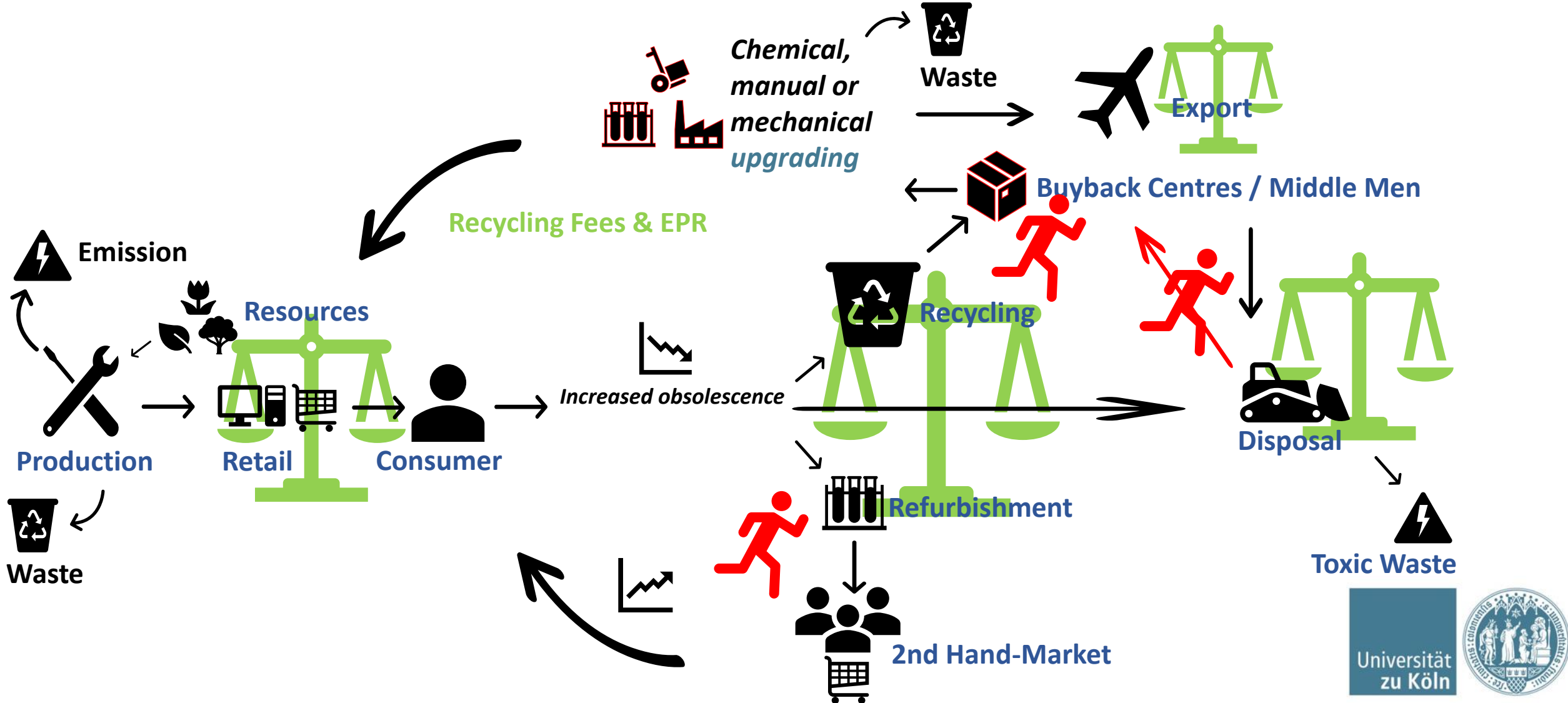
*Territorial overview of e-waste creation  
(Lydall et al. 2017, own adaptations)*



*Proportion of e-waste generation in SA  
Total e-waste in circulation 322,000t – 360,000t*



# E-Waste Value Chain



## Disadvantages for informal and formal actors through missing or private policies

“It's about commercialization, it is about making money. So, it is very difficult then for government to make a decision when they hear all those heartfelt pleas from everybody and the reality is that everybody is making sure that they can make a living out of it. And that's where government locally really doesn't have the capacity and the knowledge and the know-how to make the decisions in set those structures itself.”

“I got people I know who are eWASA accredited, (but) they have never seen anybody from eWASA, they have never been visited. Never been assessed. Never been certified. They never had any compliance or auditing or anything. But because they pay their membership fee, they got the eWASA stamp of approval and they can say "we are accredited". That's gonna stop.”

“You can't have a recycling facility and be the industry watchdog. You can't be both.”

“And the simple reality is that we really haven't get that much further in the last 20 years. “

## Disadvantages for informal and formal actors through missing or private policies

“I emailed him to say "Please send me the invoice, our certificate is expiring at the end of February, please send me the invoice so that I can make payment." Made the payment, sent the proof of payment, waited for the certificate, got the certificate, that is it. And I will speak to them next year in January.”

“Till this day in my life, I haven't been to Lesotho, they could dismantle e-waste under the blue sky and I could be thinking, everything is OK. It is a risk. I have contacted legal counseling and said, I am gonna have an affidavit. I have a form where people have to say that everything is the truth. What else should I do?”

## Alternatives for a more equal value participation

“And I think the reality is that you don't get the leopard to change its spots. What we need to be able to do is we need to provide the facilities and the opportunities for those who want to formalize. (...) What I am not going to do is to go out to the pickers and say "You and you and you, you can't do so you need to form a formal cooperative and we need to make it happen as a formal company." Forget it! Just forget it! It's just never gonna happen.”

“He will never be formal. He doesn't have the knowledge, the capacity, the know-how or even the drive formalizing his business. And we keep putting these people through accelerated programs, through Business Development programs, you are wasting your time. Seriously wasting your time. They don't want it. They're happy what they are doing, they are quite happy what they are doing, they just want a little help with access to markets and selling bits and pieces. So you got to respect that and understand, the informality has got a number of different meanings here. And work with it. Don't work against it. You just gonna get a headache.”

„Yes, it is essential for waste pickers to form cooperatives.”

“(...) the waste pickers, they want to be recognized as informal workers, with the government, the unions, the community. With the recognition, there must be respect...”

## Alternatives for a more equal value participation

“Look, that's one thing we are pushing them for them to do coops because there is no... the sense of organizing... is very low and the feeling is that you know when you sit with me in a meeting as a waste picker you are delaying me, I am supposed to be out there according to them. (...) You don't want to sit in a boardroom, you want to be out. Co-operatives are really long-term for them, you know.  
(...)

We are now pushing them now to formulate co-ops which it is not an easy process because of the registration, the processes what they have to go to.”

“(...) because waste pickers are normally arguing that it is only in recycling industry where a buyer decides the price. Because, the middle man will come and say I'll buy these for this much, it's not the waste pickers who say "I sell this for this much".”

“And the other thing, the middle men is trying by all means to make sure when we try to assist in terms of organizing waste pickers, they will make sure that waste pickers never get organized in a proper manner.”



# Impressions



*Image 3: Stored e-waste*



*Image 4: Waste Picking in Cape Town*



*Image 5: Sorting of e-waste cables*



*Image 6: Second Hand Market in Cape Town CBD*

# Conclusion



- Only regional adopted, but nationally embedded waste management approaches can be helpful
- Capacity building with (local) governance
- unified approaches > premature international approaches
- Ideas to work against negative economies of scale and missing local markets



- Explore the possibility of a more extensive South African Value
- Increased methods to fight sector-wide Cherry Picking



- Improvement of intertwining working and living conditions
- „empowerment“ & formalisation, if desired, to fight corruption and criminality → recognition as workers

# What's next?

## *Current research Project*

- Finishing the analyzing part of the project and bringing it to paper
- Comparing the proposed EPR schemes by actors and await the actions by the government

## *Key Points*

- Different understandings of informality and its role
- Short value chain is currently hindering more value creation for the SA economy
- Bad practices like 'Cherry Picking' are result of this and the weak internal markets
- Informal pickers, as the lowest TIER, are acting accordingly to this
- The role of the state is topic of a lot of discussion, leaves entrance points for private policy making with own agenda

## *Research Group*

- Submission of research proposal
- Deepening knowledge in the sector by getting more involved with informal workers
- Monitoring policy approaches and try to analyze them on a more multinational scale



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