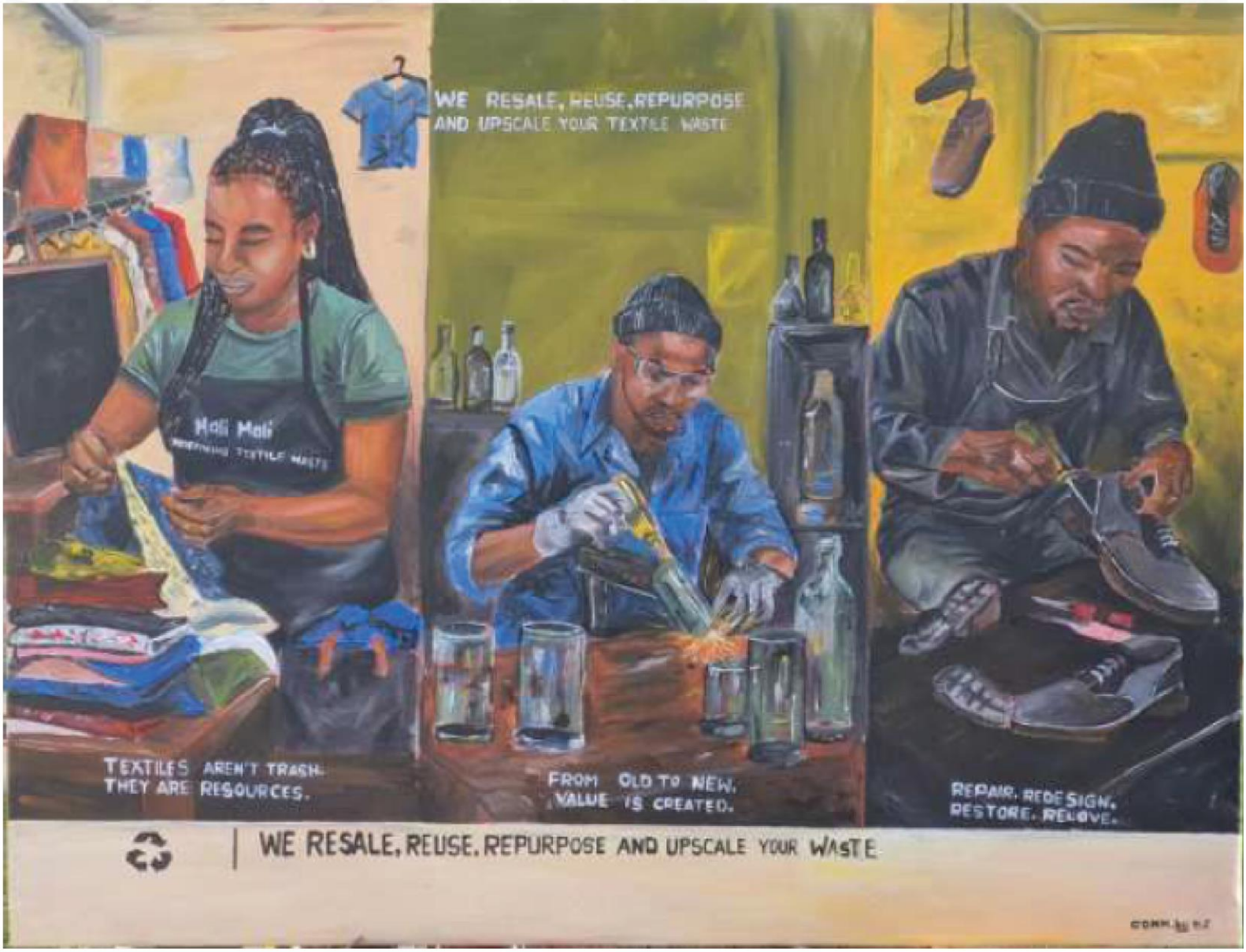
Leiden-Delft-Erasmus East Africa Research Network

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

Issue No. 22/ November 2026

My Waste Journey



My Waste Journey

By Mercy Chepng'enoh

My *Waste Journey* mural presented in 6 canvas draws attention to the hidden relationship between consumption in Nairobi's middle and upper-income neighbourhoods and the realities faced by communities living near the Dandora dumpsite. While waste is generated everyday in middle and upper-income areas through patterns of overconsumption and disposal, many residents remain disconnected from where their waste eventually ends up and the consequences it creates. The Dandora Dumpsite, which is located near a low-income settlement, receives approximately 2000-3000 tons of mixed waste daily, exposing residents to pollution, health risks, environmental degradation and social injustice. Through visual storytelling, the mural challenges this invisibility by tracing the journey of waste from middle and upper-income spaces to low-income spaces. It invites audiences to reflect on how everyday habits of consumption and disposal contribute to unequal environmental burdens, while also questioning systems that allow some communities to remain protected from the impacts of the waste they produce. In doing so, the mural becomes both an artistic expression and a call for environmental accountability, awareness and collective responsibility.

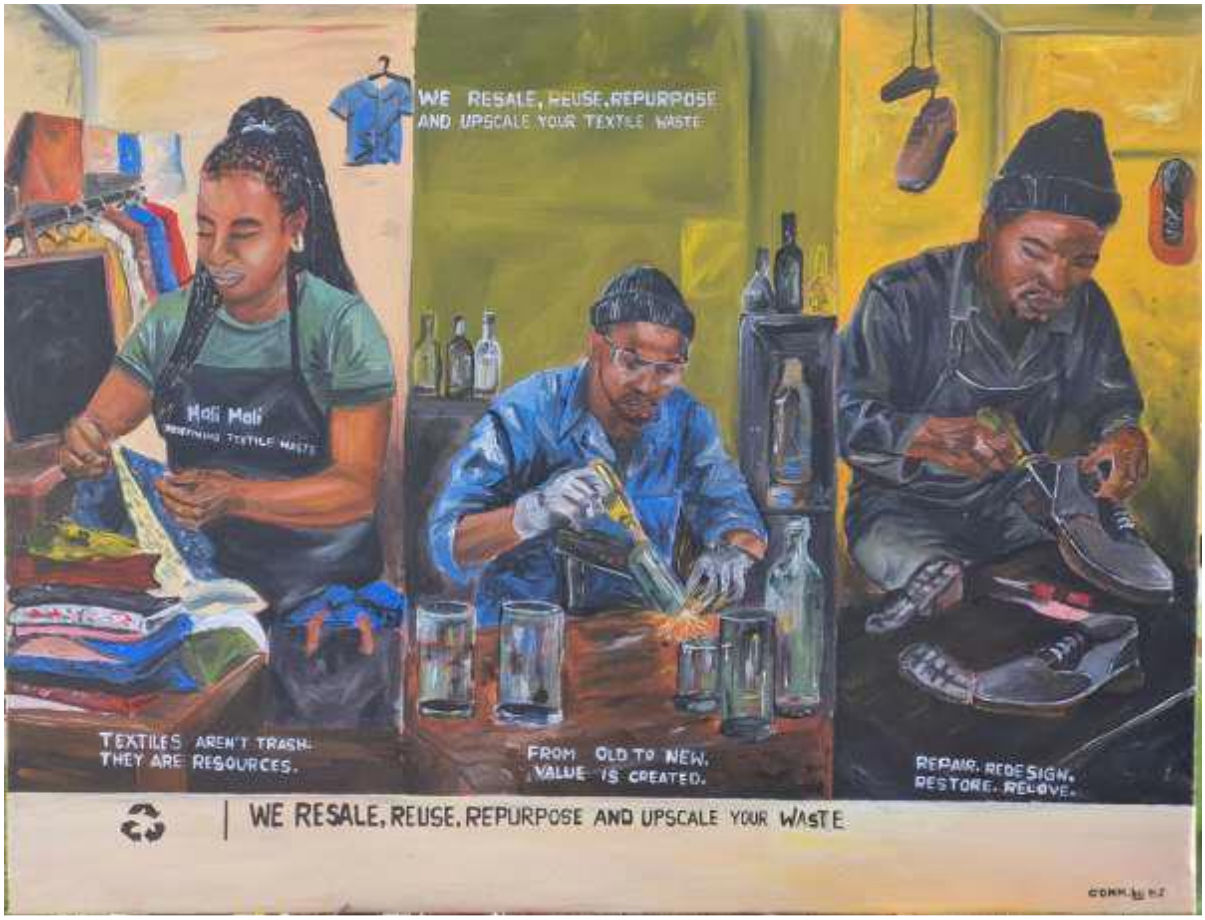
Canvas 1- Mercy's Home



It explores how waste quietly begins to pile up inside our homes through daily comfort and consumption. Mercy stands surrounded by plastic bottles, glass bottles, food packaging, old lothes and household waste while deciding between responsible sorting and careless disposal. The oversized black trash bag symbolizes the hidden future burden created by everyday habits showing how personal choices slowly contribute to larger environmental problems.

Policy Impact: The art piece advocates for stronger waste segregation systems, environmental awareness, sustainable consumption practices and improved community waste management initiatives

CANVAS 2



Mercy quietly watches as her waste is reused, repurposed and up-scaled. She donates her textile waste to families in need or give them to Mali Mali traders who engage in direct exchange of goods for other goods without using money, for example clothes in exchange of new kitchen or laundry items. Some mali mali traders restitch the clothes and sell them in open air markets, some reuse the fabric for new items while others use them to make rags they then sell. Glass bottles. For these she piles them until they get to 10 or 15 then takes them to a glass cutter in the neighbourhood. He cleans them, cuts them into, drinking glasses and vases. She sometimes donates wine bottles to artists who paint them into beautiful art vases. She takes her old shoes to her local fundi (shoe repair guy). He salvages usable parts for repairs especially soles, straps and the rest might become crafts or padding. Economic / Livelihoods Impact: This art piece highlights how waste reuse, repair and upcycling create informal livelihood opportunities within local communities. It demonstrates how discarded household items can support small-scale traders, artisans, repair workers and creative entrepreneurs while promoting circular economy practices. The piece advocates for recognition and support of grassroots recycling and repair economies as pathways to sustainable livelihoods and reduced waste.

Canvas 3- Dandora Dumpsite

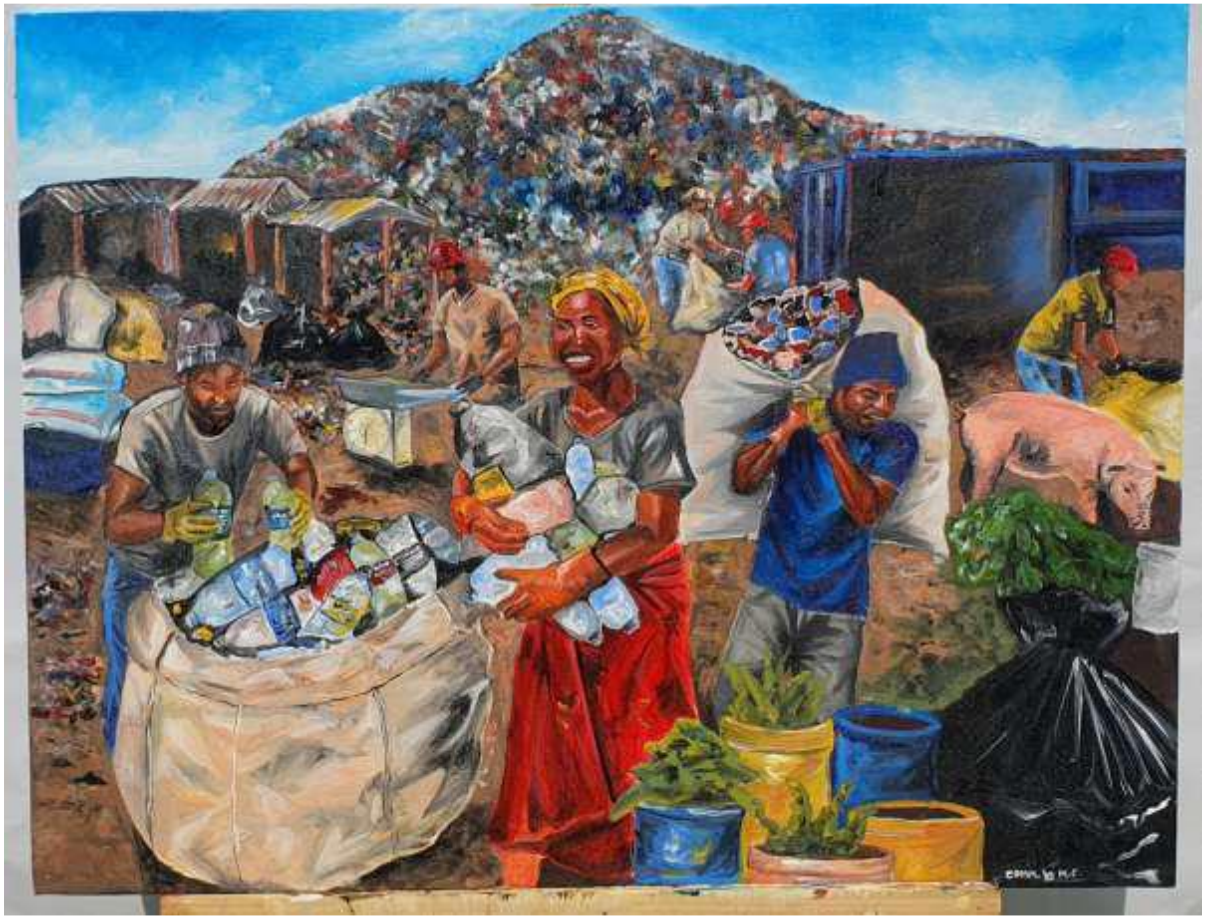


The arrival of a garbage dump is a cherished occasion. The mural captures the arrival of waste t the Dandora Dumpsite where most of Nairobi waste is dumped. Garbage trucks unload mountains of discarded materials as waste pickers rush in to sort the waste. This mural depicts their working environment defined by no protective clothing or gears. It shows how everyday household waste transforms into another community's workplace exposing inequality, poverty and environmental injustice.

Environmental Impact: The art piece illustrates the harmful effects of poor waste management which include environmental pollution, hazardous living conditions and the concentration of waste in already vulnerable areas. It emphasizes the need for sustainable disposal systems, recycling initiatives and environmentally responsible urban waste policies.

Injustice Impact: The art piece exposes the social inequalities surrounding waste disposal, where marginalized communities bear the environmental and health burdens of a city's consumption. It highlights the unsafe working conditions faced by waste pickers and calls for greater protection, recognition and environmental justice for affected communities.

Canvas 4



This mural captures how waste is sorted and segregated at the Dandora Dumpsite. **Plastics** are sold to aggregators, and the waste pickers earn some money to meet their family needs. Some plastics stay local and are reused in homes as buckets or basins. Artists even collect them to make beautiful art, flowerpots, and decorations for reclaimed parks in Dandora. Organic food is sold to pig farmers and in other cases used by community members to make compost. Glass bottles are sold to glass companies or sometimes upscaled to make water glasses or glass decorations, whereas metals are sold to welders and scrap dealers. The Circular Economy Impact: The art piece demonstrates how waste materials can be recovered, reused, repaired and transformed into valuable resources within local communities. It highlights the role of waste pickers, artists, farmers and informal traders in sustaining circular economy practices that reduce waste, generate income and promote environmental sustainability.

Canvas 5



The painful reality faced by communities living near Dandora Dumpsite where polluted rivers, toxic smoke from burning waste and sickness affect everyday life is depicted in this mural. Children are studying in contaminated spaces while families struggle to survive revealing the human and environmental cost of poor waste management and neglect. The everyday lives of communities living near the dump site are intertwined with waste and waste management activities. The Urban Environment Impact: The art piece reveals how poor urban waste management practices negatively shapes the living conditions of communities surrounding the dumpsite through pollution, toxic emissions, contaminated water sources and unsafe public spaces. It highlights the urgent need for inclusive urban planning, environmental protection and healthier living environments for marginalized communities.

Canvas 6



It is a call to action to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle our waste. The mural presents a collaborative, vertical and horizontal approach towards waste management. From the city to the household, and from the one stakeholder to another, government to citizens, waste management requires a collective action approach towards sustainability and positive impact.

Policy and Decision-Making Impact: The art piece advocates for collaborative and inclusive waste management policies that promote shared responsibility among governments, communities, households and private stakeholders. It emphasizes the need for coordinated action, sustainable decision-making and stronger recycling and waste reduction systems to achieve long-term environmental sustainability.