



“We have uniforms and I feel proud to put it on because we play an important role in the city.”

S. Murugan, Matale, Sri Lanka

IRRCs provide job security and elevate the value of waste collection



Photographs courtesy of Brent Lewin

For 40-year-old S. Murugan, a worker at the Integrated Resource Recovery Centre (IRRC) in Matale, handling waste is nothing new. “Matale’s waste has provided livelihoods for generations of people,” says Murugan whose father and grandfather both earned their living from scavenging for scrap metal to sell to local scrap shops. As part of an initiative to provide employment and take advantage of resources from waste, the Matale Municipal Council, together with SEVANTHA Urban Resource Centre and ESCAP, established its first IRRC in 2007. The IRRC where Murugan works is operated by Micro Enriched Compost (MEC), a company started by SEVANATHA Urban Resource Centre. “Before, I had no security,” says Murugan.

“When I woke up in the morning I didn’t know if I would earn enough to feed my family. Now I have a salary and own my own home. I’m very grateful for this opportunity,” says Murugan. “When I used to work on the streets, people didn’t respect my work.”

Building on the success of the first centre, a second IRRC recently opened in Matale. The new centre was developed with funds from the National Pilisaru Programme and is now also operated by MEC. In the Matale municipality, MEC and waste workers like Murugan are demonstrating how, if managed properly, organic waste – which makes up a majority of the municipal waste in Asian cities – can be put back into the economy in the form of compost.

For more information please contact ESCAP’s Sustainable Urban Development Section, e-mail: escap-edd-suds@un.org

