



Financing Zero Waste

A High-Level Synthesis Report

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Executive Summary

This publication is a high-level synthesis of the Zero Waste Finance Guide series, drawing on companion guidance for local and national governments to address a central challenge: financing the transition to zero waste requires more than securing capital for new infrastructure. It requires an approach that recognizes the wider public value of waste management, addresses the structural barriers that limit local implementation, and aligns national policy and fiscal frameworks with the realities of municipal service delivery. This synthesis brings together the findings of the Local and National Government Guides to identify common financing challenges and outline a complementary strategy for addressing them.

A central finding is that persistent underfunding is not simply a result of insufficient finance. Local governments are responsible for delivering waste services but often face constraints in revenue, institutional capacity, and access to long-term funding, each of which is often inadequate or unpredictable. At the same time, many of the fiscal, regulatory and market conditions that shape what municipalities can implement are determined nationally. When these systems are poorly aligned, available finance may not translate into functioning and sustainable operation of public services.

The synthesis also highlights the broader value that zero waste systems can generate across multiple sectors. Prevention, reuse, recycling, and organic waste management can reduce transport and disposal costs, create employment and support existing livelihoods, strengthen markets for recovered materials, and deliver wider public health, environmental, climate, and resilience benefits. Because many of these benefits extend beyond the waste sector and materialize over time, they are not always captured through conventional waste budgets or narrow assessments of financial return. Financing decisions should therefore consider the wider public value generated by zero waste systems.

The findings point to the importance of a two-tier financing approach. Local governments are the frontline implementers, combining public budgets, existing resources, and context-appropriate financing approaches to establish and operate services. National governments play a complementary role by creating the fiscal, regulatory, and institutional conditions that enable local systems to develop and scale. This includes strengthening intergovernmental finance, regulatory frameworks, and market conditions, and expanding access to wider sources of domestic and international finance.

Financing approaches must also reflect different municipal starting points. Cities and municipalities operate with different levels of service coverage, institutional capacity, and financial readiness, and therefore require different pathways for financing the transition. Accessible public finance and grants can help establish the foundations for basic services and resource recovery, while more specialized and performance-based approaches may become appropriate as systems and institutional capacity mature. Readiness should be understood as a progressive pathway rather than a prerequisite for accessing finance.

Across both levels of government, recurring pitfalls include: prioritizing capital investment without securing ongoing operational expenditure (OPEX); applying standardized models without considering local context and readiness; fragmented institutional coordination, including limited mechanisms to include waste pickers, cooperatives, and other community-based operators in planning and financing decisions; measuring progress through finance mobilized or infrastructure built rather than outcomes achieved; relying on external finance without establishing sustainable domestic financing; and committing to large-scale, capital-intensive infrastructure that risks long-term technological lock-in.

Taken together, the findings suggest that financing zero waste implementation at the local level does not necessarily need to wait for entirely new sources of funding. Progress can begin when available resources are appropriately allocated, financing approaches are matched to local contexts and starting points, and national governments create enabling fiscal, regulatory, and institutional conditions.

By connecting national action with local implementation, governments can support zero waste not simply as an additional waste management cost, but as a form of public investment that contributes to healthier communities, improved livelihoods, resource efficiency, climate action, and more resilient local economies.

Setting The Right Paradigm for Financing Zero Waste

Waste management generates value beyond the collection and disposal of waste, including cleaner communities, improved public health, reduced pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, resource recovery, employment, and greater urban resilience (Putra, 2025; UNEP, 2024; World Bank Group, 2026). However, many of these benefits are not fully captured through conventional government budgets and financial returns (World Bank Group, 2026). The absence of a strong financial return does not necessarily mean that an investment lacks economic or public value (Putra, 2025; World Bank Group, 2016).

This has important implications for how zero waste is financed. Activities such as prevention, reuse, recycling, and organic waste management can generate revenues or avoid costs, but many of their wider social and environmental benefits cannot be easily monetized (CAN International, 2025). Financing decisions should therefore look beyond direct financial returns. Applying a profitability test to the waste system can favor large, centralized, and capital-intensive infrastructure while overlooking the public value and ongoing operational requirements of upstream systems (Putra, 2025).

A balanced financing approach combines public and commercial finance according to the type of value being created. Public finance has an important role in supporting essential services and wider public benefits, while private finance can complement public resources where viable revenue opportunities exist (Putra, 2025; World Bank Group, 2026). The two guides therefore focus on three complementary areas: financing essential public services, enabling viable markets for recovered materials and other outputs, and using policy and fiscal tools to ensure that public and private finance reinforce rather than undermine the transition to zero waste.

This synthesis follows the terminology used across the Local and National Government Guides. Financing mechanisms provide upfront capital that is typically repaid over time, such as loans, bonds, and blended finance. Funding mechanisms provide recurring, non-repayable revenue to sustain ongoing operations, such as grants, user fees, tariffs, transfers, and ring-fenced cost savings. A financing approach refers to the broader strategy that combines financing and funding mechanisms with the institutional, legal, and operational conditions needed to access and sustain them.

Shared Diagnosis: Why Waste Underfunding Persists

Local governments — including municipalities, cities, and other local authorities — hold administrative responsibility for solid waste management in most countries. They oversee operations in more than three-quarters of cities studied, though actual service delivery is more evenly split, with roughly half of collection, transport, treatment, and disposal publicly operated and the remainder delivered through private or public-private arrangements. National governments, meanwhile, set the fiscal, regulatory, and institutional conditions in which these services operate; nearly all countries (94%) have a national agency or department mandated to oversee the sector, even where implementation itself remains local (World Bank Group, 2026). The recurring challenges below illustrate how financing constraints arise and interact across both levels of government:

DIMENSION	LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES	NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES
1 Budget share and fiscal prioritization	Waste competes with other municipal priorities while requiring significant recurring expenditure for collection, transport, treatment, and disposal.	Waste competes with health, education, housing, and transport, while many benefits of waste investment accrue across these sectors.
2 Structural financing gaps	Capital financing may be available without sufficient resources for ongoing collection, staffing, maintenance, and other operational expenditure (OPEX).	Fiscal systems may prioritize capital investment without creating sustainable financing channels for long-term municipal operating costs.
3 Institutional capacity and coordination	Limited technical, financial, procurement, project preparation, monitoring, and contracting capacity can restrict access to and effective use of finance. Fragmentation across municipal departments can also limit coordination and access to complementary resources.	Fragmented institutional responsibilities and limited cross-sectoral coordination can weaken the design and implementation of financing mechanisms. Responsibilities and budgets may be distributed across finance, environment, agriculture, energy, labor, and urban development, resulting in fragmented or contradictory policies.

DIMENSION	LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES	NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES
4 Infrastructure bias	Pressure to invest in large infrastructure can arise before basic collection, source separation, and recovery systems are established. Collection rates average only 28% in low-income countries (World Bank Group, 2026).	National financing and infrastructure programs can favor large, centralized projects over prevention, reuse, recycling, and organics. In three-quarters of low- and middle-income countries, less than 0.15% of GDP is spent on waste, compared with an estimated 0.3–0.8% of GDP required for universal collection (World Bank Group, 2026).
5 Misaligned fiscal incentives	Local financing decisions can be constrained by incentives and pricing structures established beyond municipal control.	Transfers, subsidies, tax incentives, and other fiscal instruments may fail to reward diversion, favor disposal-based solutions, or undermine demand for recovered materials and compost.
6 Difficulty capturing and reinvesting savings	Avoided landfill, transport, and disposal costs may be absorbed into general budgets rather than retained and reinvested in zero waste.	Fiscal frameworks may not provide mechanisms for municipalities to retain or reinvest savings generated through improved waste performance.
7 Fragmented financing and revenue flows	Municipalities may struggle to access funding from multiple programs, departments, or revenue sources.	EPR may generate resources without ensuring that sufficient finance reaches municipalities and local actors responsible for implementation.
8 Exclusion of informal and community-based operators	Waste pickers, cooperatives, SMEs, and community organizations may be excluded from formal procurement, contracting, and financing systems despite their contribution to recovery.	National legal and procurement frameworks can either enable or restrict the formal participation of these actors in waste systems.

DIMENSION	LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES	NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CHALLENGES
9 Dependence on external and project-based funding	Projects may become unsustainable when grants end because domestic OPEX has not been secured.	Reliance on external funding without integration into national budgets, legislation, and long-term financing frameworks can create fragmented and short-term interventions.
10 Climate finance disconnect from local implementation	Local governments and frontline implementers often have limited influence over international climate finance and may have limited influence over investment priorities. Financing may therefore be designed without sufficient consideration of local waste systems, institutional capacity, or community needs.	International climate finance is often channelled through national governments, development finance institutions, and investment pipelines, with priorities influenced by national climate commitments such as NDCs. International climate finance is shaped by political commitments, national priorities, and the investment pipelines of development finance institutions. Where these priorities are not aligned with local conditions and the waste hierarchy, finance can favor large, capital-intensive, or technology-led solutions, including Waste-to-Energy (WTE) incineration, rather than prevention, reuse, recycling, and organic waste management.

These challenges indicate that the financing gap is largely systemic, occurring at different points in the financing flow – from how governments and financial institutions set priorities and allocate resources, to whether funding can be accessed, translated into functioning services, and sustained over time. They also interact across levels of government and across the wider financing system: local constraints can limit the effectiveness of national financing mechanisms, while national fiscal, regulatory, and market conditions can constrain what municipalities are able to implement.



At the international level, climate and development finance is also shaped by political commitments, national priorities, and investment pipelines. Where these priorities are disconnected from local conditions and the waste hierarchy, the availability of finance can influence which solutions are pursued, rather than finance being directed towards the solutions that are most appropriate to local needs and zero waste objectives.

A further challenge is the tendency for financing to favor large, capital-intensive infrastructure, which can create structural lock-in around disposal-based systems. Waste-to-Energy (WTE) incineration is a particularly important example. Research on waste incineration in the Göteborg Metropolitan Area, Sweden, demonstrates how lock-in can develop through interacting institutional, technical, cultural, and material factors, reinforcing dependence on existing infrastructure and making alternative systems more difficult to establish (Corvellec et al., 2013).

Comparative research on waste transitions in Austria, Sweden, and Finland similarly identifies interactions between social, political, technical, and economic factors as contributing to stable waste-management regimes, with incineration capacity identified as a common lock-in across the three countries (Salmenperä, 2021).



The Strategic Case: Zero Waste as Opportunity, Not Cost

Waste management is an essential public service that requires ongoing investment, but it also generates a range of public value that is often overlooked in conventional financial assessments. The Local and National Government Guides demonstrate that shifting towards prevention, reuse, recycling, and organic waste management can generate benefits across health, climate, employment, resource efficiency, and resilience, providing a broader basis for assessing the value of investment in zero waste. The two guides identify a broader range of benefits and financing opportunities. This synthesis focuses on five key areas that illustrate the wider public value of investing in zero waste: fiscal savings, employment, resource recovery, circular economy markets, and public health. These benefits often materialize over longer time horizons, helping explain why waste can lose out to shorter-horizon spending priorities at both levels of government (UNEP, 2024; World Bank Group, 2026).

Fiscal savings and efficiency

Prevention, reuse, recycling, and organic waste management can reduce reliance on costly downstream infrastructure, lower transport and disposal costs, and extend the life of existing disposal capacity (World Bank Group, 2018). The Local Government Guide identifies approaches that quantify avoided landfill, transport and disposal costs, and reinvest these savings into zero waste operations. Examples include an estimated US\$1 million in savings over ten years in Durban, approximately US\$17,864 annually through Buenos Aires' RUO model, and US\$1,152–2,880 annually through Accra's GAYO model (Jones et al., 2025; Allen & Moon, 2025a, 2025b). Comparative financial analysis of solid waste management business models in Indonesia and Brazil similarly finds that decentralized models – including community-based composting in Bandung and waste picker cooperatives and home composting in Brazil – achieved competitive or lower levelized costs of waste management than centralized government or private operators, despite thinner operating margins (CPI, 2025).

Employment and inclusive economic development

Zero waste systems can generate employment across collection, sorting, recycling, repair, reuse, composting, and other resource recovery activities, while strengthening existing livelihoods, including those of waste pickers (Ribeiro-Broomhead & Tangri, 2021; Putra, 2025; UNEP, 2024; World Bank Group, 2026; Vilella, 2020). The Hasiru Dala Dry Waste Collection Centre model in Bangalore demonstrates how decentralized resource recovery can support waste picker livelihoods, while Bandung's use of municipal funds to employ more than 1,500 workers in decentralized waste operations illustrates how waste management can also contribute to local employment and service delivery (Danielson, 2020; Media Indonesia, 2026). Integrating waste pickers, cooperatives and other community-based operators into municipal systems can therefore strengthen both livelihoods and service provision.

Resource recovery and local economic value

Recycling, reuse, repair, composting, and other forms of recovery create demand for local services while keeping materials and nutrients in productive use for longer (GAIA, 2021). Organic waste is particularly significant: composting can return nutrients to soils, while organic waste can also support decentralized biogas systems (ISWA, 2020a). These activities can generate value not only through the sale of recovered materials, but also through reduced demand for virgin resources, local processing, agricultural inputs, energy generation, and associated economic activity.

Building circular economy markets

Public procurement, fiscal incentives, and other policy tools can help create demand for recovered materials and support markets that are still developing (World Bank Group, 2026). The National Government Guide identifies subsidy redirection and procurement as opportunities to improve the viability of compost and organic fertilizer markets, while local incentives can encourage source separation. For example, *Banjar Tegeh Sari* in Bali prices organic waste 60% lower than residual waste, creating a financial incentive for households to separate waste at source (PPLH Bali, 2026).

Financing zero waste therefore also requires attention to the policies and market conditions that create demand for recovered products.

Public health, environmental quality, and resilience

The benefits of zero waste extend well beyond the waste sector. Reducing open dumping and burning can improve air quality and sanitation, while better waste management can reduce pollution entering waterways (UNEP, 2015, 2024; World Bank Group, 2018).

Organic waste diversion and composting can improve soil health, water retention, contributing to resilience to drought and flooding (ISWA, 2020b). Diverting organic waste from disposal also reduces methane emissions, while prevention, reuse, and recycling can reduce the resource and emissions intensity associated with producing and disposing of materials (Vilella, 2020). These benefits connect waste investment with wider public health, climate, agriculture, water, and resilience priorities.

Complementary Financing Approaches: A Two-Tier System

The transition to zero waste requires a two-tier financing system in which national and local governments play complementary and mutually reinforcing roles. Local governments are the frontline implementers, combining practical financing mechanisms to establish and operate services, while national governments act as systemic enablers by creating the legal, regulatory, fiscal, and financial conditions needed to support and scale local action (Putra, 2025).

At the local level, financing can begin with accessible approaches that build on existing resources, including in-kind contributions, public land and equipment, and inter-departmental budgets. As systems develop, procurement reform and cost-savings models can help redirect expenditure away from transport and disposal towards decentralized, collection, recovery, and organic waste management. In Bandung, Indonesia, for example, a municipal waste subsidy was redirected towards decentralized operations supporting more than 1,500 local waste workers (Media Indonesia, 2026). Local governments can also use funding mechanisms, where appropriate, such as Pay-As-You-Throw (PAYT) schemes and incentives for source-separated organic waste. In *Banjar Tegeh Sari*, Bali, organic waste is charged at a lower rate than residual waste to encourage source separation (PPLH Bali, 2026). More specialized financing mechanisms, including sustainability-linked loans and green or sustainability bonds, may become appropriate as municipal systems and institutional capacity mature.

National governments operate at a different level, shaping the fiscal, regulatory, and financial environment in which municipalities operate. Their role includes establishing dedicated budget lines and financing channels for zero waste, anchoring frameworks such as Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in national policy and regulation, and reforming intergovernmental fiscal transfers to support prevention, source separation, and diversion. National governments can also help mobilize broader sources of domestic, private, and institutional finance through appropriate risk-sharing and financing mechanisms, while linking zero waste strategies with climate and development priorities, including through measurable targets for organic waste diversion and methane. The effectiveness of this two-tier financing approach depends on the connection between national frameworks and local implementation. National policies and financing mechanisms need to translate into resources and enabling conditions that municipalities and local operators can access and use to deliver services. This is particularly important for EPR: national regulatory frameworks can generate significant resources, but their effectiveness in supporting zero waste depends on how those resources are allocated and whether they reach the municipalities, waste pickers, and other operators responsible for collection and recovery.

A two-tier financing system therefore aligns national policy, fiscal capacity, and regulatory authority with the operational realities of local implementation. When these levels work together, waste financing can move beyond addressing immediate municipal budget pressures towards supporting the wider public benefits of zero waste including improved health and environmental outcomes, employment, resource recovery, soil health, and climate action.



Matching Financing Approaches to Readiness: City Archetypes

Local governments—including municipalities, cities, and other local authorities—operate from very different starting points in terms of service coverage, financial capacity, institutional readiness, and ability to manage more complex financing mechanisms. The Local Government Guide therefore identifies three broad stages of readiness: Start-Up, Transitioning, and Advanced—referred to here as city archetypes—as a practical lens for matching financing approaches to local conditions.



For **Start-Up Cities**, the priority is to establish the basic foundations of reliable waste services, source separation, and resource recovery. Financing should therefore focus on accessible forms of public finance and grants, basic operational support, and the use of existing public resources, rather than mechanisms that require sophisticated financial, administrative, or regulatory capacity.



For **Transitioning Cities**, financing can increasingly focus on sustaining and improving services, expanding diversion and recovery, and developing local markets. At this stage, funding mechanisms such as cost-savings reinvestment, procurement reform, subsidy redirection, and partnerships can help strengthen operations while progressively reducing reliance on disposal.



Advanced Cities may be better positioned to use more sophisticated financing and regulatory instruments, including performance-based instruments and other approaches that support prevention, mature circular economy markets, and the reduction of residual waste.

These archetypes should not be treated as fixed categories or a ranking of municipalities. Their purpose is to recognize different local realities and starting points, and to ensure that financing approaches are matched to what cities can realistically implement at a particular stage. The same principle applies to national financing mechanisms: EPR, fiscal transfers, performance-based programs, and other financing frameworks should provide proportionate requirements and multiple entry points rather than applying the same conditions to all municipalities.

The bottom line is that there is no single financing model for zero waste. Finance needs to follow local context and a city's starting point, supporting municipalities to progressively strengthen their systems and capacity, rather than making high levels of institutional readiness a prerequisite for accessing finance.

Common Pitfalls Across Both Levels

The challenges identified across the Local and National Government Guides point to a set of recurring pitfalls. While they manifest differently at each level of government, they reflect a common underlying problem: financing decisions are often misaligned with institutional capacity, local implementation realities, and the longer-term public value that zero waste systems can generate.

Neglecting Ongoing OPEX

At the local level, grants and investment may cover land, infrastructure, and equipment, without providing reliable resources for salaries, maintenance, and ongoing operations. A similar bias can occur nationally, where financing mechanisms favor visible, capital-intensive infrastructure over the recurring expenditure required to sustain service delivery.

One-Size-Fits-All Design

Financing approaches that do not account for different local starting points can set municipalities up to fail. Local governments may adopt systems or financing mechanisms beyond their current capacity, while national programs may apply uniform requirements, technologies, or service models across authorities with very different waste profiles, institutional capacity, and levels of readiness. Financing therefore needs to be matched to context and to the stage of development of local systems.

Institutional and Coordination Gaps

Financing for waste is often fragmented across institutions and sectors, while many of the benefits of zero waste accrue beyond the waste sector. At the local level, this can result in departmental silos, fragmented budgets, and limited mechanisms for contracting waste picker cooperatives, SMEs, and other community-based operators. At the national level, treating waste primarily as a 'sanitation' issue can limit coordination with health, climate, agriculture, labor, and other sectors. These institutional gaps can prevent governments from aligning resources with the wider benefits generated by zero waste systems.

Equating Finance Mobilization with Progress

At both levels, there is a risk of measuring success through the volume of finance mobilized, infrastructure built or contracts signed rather than through the outcomes that financing achieves. This can favor large, visible, and readily bankable projects, even where smaller, decentralized systems could deliver greater diversion, lower operating costs, and wider public benefits. The focus should therefore extend beyond how much finance is mobilized to what that finance enables.

External Finance Replacing Domestic Institutionalization

External grants, concessional finance, and donor programs can play an important catalytic role, particularly in the early stages of the transition. The risk arises when external finance substitutes for the development of sustainable domestic finance and institutional arrangements. Locally, projects may struggle once grant funding ends if ongoing operations have not been secured; nationally, externally supported programs that are not integrated into policy, public budgets, and longer-term financing frameworks can remain isolated pilots rather than contributing to sustained system change.

Infrastructure and Technology Lock-in

Financing decisions that favor large, capital-intensive infrastructure — particularly WTE incineration — can create structural lock-in that is difficult to reverse once built, entrenching disposal-based systems and crowding out investment in prevention, reuse, recycling, and organic waste management for decades. This risk applies at both levels of government: national financing and infrastructure programs that prioritize centralized technologies over upstream systems, and local governments that commit to long-term contracts or facilities before basic separation and collection systems are established.

Taken together, these pitfalls reinforce the central finding of this report: the challenge is not simply to mobilize more finance, but to ensure that financing is appropriately structured, matched to local capacity and institutional conditions, and capable of supporting systems over the long term.

Cross-Level Recommendations

Neither local nor national governments can finance the transition to zero waste independently. **An effective approach requires connecting national fiscal and regulatory action with local implementation, so that each level addresses the constraints that the other cannot resolve.**

Policy and fiscal reform

- Establish and prioritize national regulatory and fiscal frameworks that support prevention, reuse, recycling, and organic waste management (Putra, 2025; Nohales & Stinavage, 2024).
- Reform intergovernmental transfers, incentives, and financing channels so that resources can reach municipalities and other local actors responsible for implementation (UNEP, 2024).
- Ensure that national EPR and PAYT frameworks include mechanisms through which funding can be accessed by municipalities, SMEs, and waste picker cooperatives, including to address recurring operational costs.
- Align national policies across finance, environment, agriculture, climate, employment, and other relevant sectors to recognize and support the cross-sectoral public benefits of zero waste systems (Kaza et al., 2016; Putra, 2025; World Bank Group, 2018).
- Strengthen mechanisms for direct or simplified access to international climate finance for local governments, waste picker organizations, and community-based operators, reducing dependence on national intermediation while ensuring investment pipelines follow the waste hierarchy priorities (CAN International, 2025; Putra, 2025).
- Avoid financing commitments to large-scale, capital-intensive disposal infrastructure — including WTE incineration — before basic collection, source separation, and resource recovery systems are established and functioning, to prevent long-term technological and contractual lock-in (Corvellec et al., 2013; Salmenperä et al., 2021).

Predictable municipal finance and sustainable operation

- Provide local governments with reliable and accessible finance that enables planning beyond individual projects and short-term cycles — combining financing mechanisms for capital investment with funding mechanisms for recurring OPEX (CAN International, 2025; Putra, 2025).

- Reform fiscal transfer mechanisms to enable local governments to retain and reinvest savings generated through reduced disposal, transport, and landfill costs (Putra, 2025; Jones et al., 2025).
- Ensure that available finance is translated into functioning local services and implementation models that can be sustained after initial grants or capital financing end (Kaza et al., 2016; UNEP, 2024; World Bank Group, 2018; Nohales & Stinavage, 2024).

Markets and worker integration

- Develop demand for recyclables, compost, and other recovered materials through public procurement, pricing, and market-support measures (Kaza et al., 2016; UNEP, 2024; Vilella, 2020).
- Integrate waste pickers, cooperatives, SMEs, and community-based operators into formal service delivery and financing systems as a shared priority for national and local governments (Putra, 2025; UNEP, 2024; World Bank Group, 2018).

Increasing municipal readiness and more sophisticated finance

- Strengthen municipal systems, financial management, data, monitoring, and service performance over time, using demonstrated performance to progressively expand access to more sophisticated financing (UNEP, 2024; World Bank Group, 2018, 2026).
- Recognize that readiness is progressive, rather than a prerequisite by applying tiered financing requirements and eligibility criteria aligned with institutional readiness (Kaza et al., 2016).
- As municipal systems mature, introduce appropriate blended, commercial, performance-based, and other innovative financing mechanisms to support higher levels of prevention, reuse, recycling, and organic waste diversion (CAN International, 2025; UNEP, 2024; World Bank Group, 2018, 2026).

Conclusion

Financing the transition to zero waste does not need to wait for entirely new sources of funding or for cities to reach a particular level of institutional maturity. Zero waste implementation can begin now, provided that available resources are allocated through mechanisms and approaches suited to local contexts and starting points.

The central challenge is therefore not simply to mobilize more finance, but to ensure that financing supports the systems that are needed: prevention, reuse, recycling, organic waste management, and the ongoing services that underpin them. This requires predictable financing for infrastructure and funding for operations, financing mechanisms that recognize different levels of municipal readiness, and the integration of waste pickers, community-based operators, and other local actors into service delivery and financing systems.

National governments have a critical role in creating the enabling conditions for this transition through fiscal policy, regulation, intergovernmental transfers, market development, and access to domestic and international finance. Local governments can translate these enabling conditions into context-specific systems that respond to local waste profiles, institutional capacity, and community needs.

Ultimately, financing zero waste at the local level is possible now when resources are appropriately allocated, financing mechanisms are matched to local realities, and national governments provide the enabling fiscal, regulatory, and institutional environment needed to support implementation. The transition depends not on a single financing model, but on connecting national action with local implementation so that each level can address the constraints that the other cannot resolve.

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About GAIA

GAIA is a network of grassroots groups as well as national and regional alliances representing more than 1000 organizations from over 100 countries. With our work we aim to catalyze a global shift towards environmental justice by strengthening grassroots social movements that advance solutions to waste and pollution. We envision a just, Zero Waste world built on respect for ecological limits and community rights, where people are free from the burden of toxic pollution, and resources are sustainably conserved, not burned or dumped. www.no-burn.org

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Financing Zero Waste:

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