



Shades of informality: Working with waste pickers in ARISE

Background

Accountability for Informal Urban Equity (ARISE) Hub is a consortium of interconnected and interdisciplinary research and action groups across Africa, South Asia, and the United Kingdom, funded by GCRF/UKRI under their Interdisciplinary Research Hubs scheme.

Part of the ARISE work in India is steered through The George Institute for Global Health, India (TGI, India), focusing on 'waste pickers & waste picking communities' which represent urban informality at its most marginal.

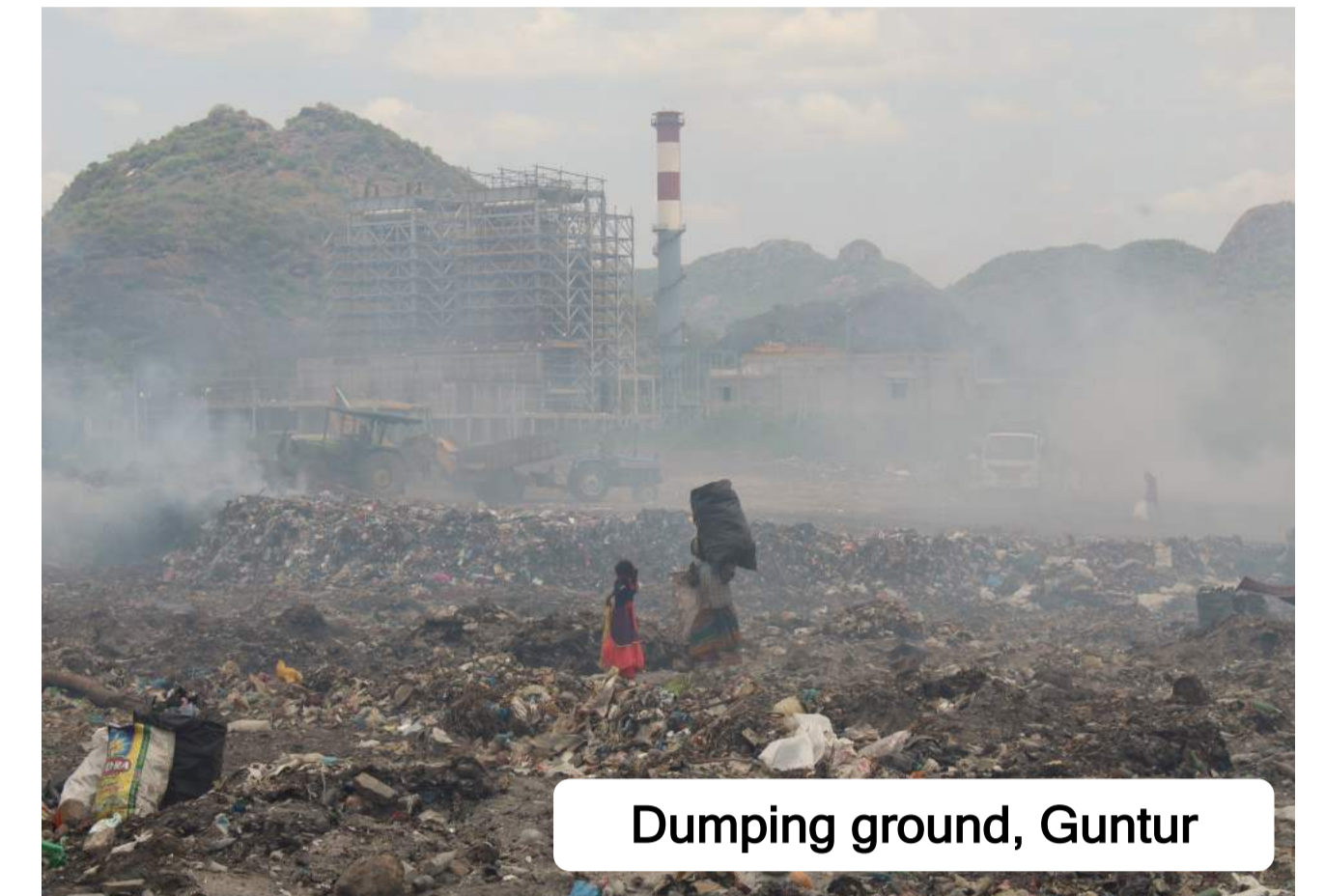
Aim: to understand and describe how accountability arrangements can be strengthened for people living and working in informal urban spaces in order to improve equitable health and well-being.

India's informal waste economy consists of socially, occupationally, and economically differentiated categories of 'waste people' - an integral part of the 'waste-to-resource' value chain.

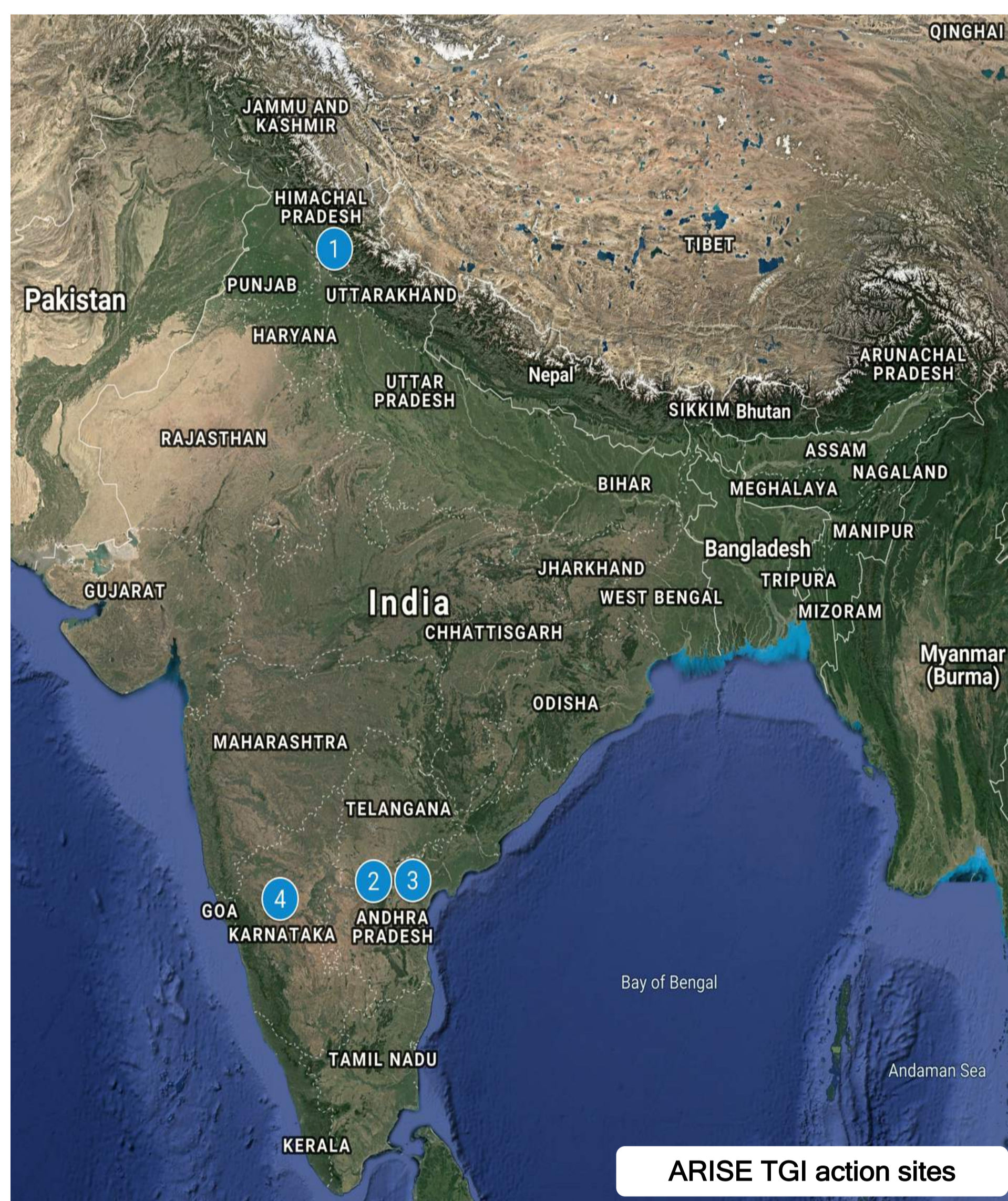


Sanitation for sanitation workers is conspicuously absent; the dirtier and more dangerous the work, the lower the pay and the more physically taxing the work conditions

- Barbara Harriss-White, 2019



Action sites and approaches



1. Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

Collaboration with the union of government sanitation workers - 'Safai Mazdoor Union' - within the municipal corporation, to study the governance and accountability mechanisms for the health and well-being of the workers within the government



2. Guntur, Andhra Pradesh & 3. Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh

Collaboration with a rights-based organised collective of Dalits - 'Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre' (DBRC) - to study rights-based approaches to governance and accountability



4. Bengaluru, Karnataka

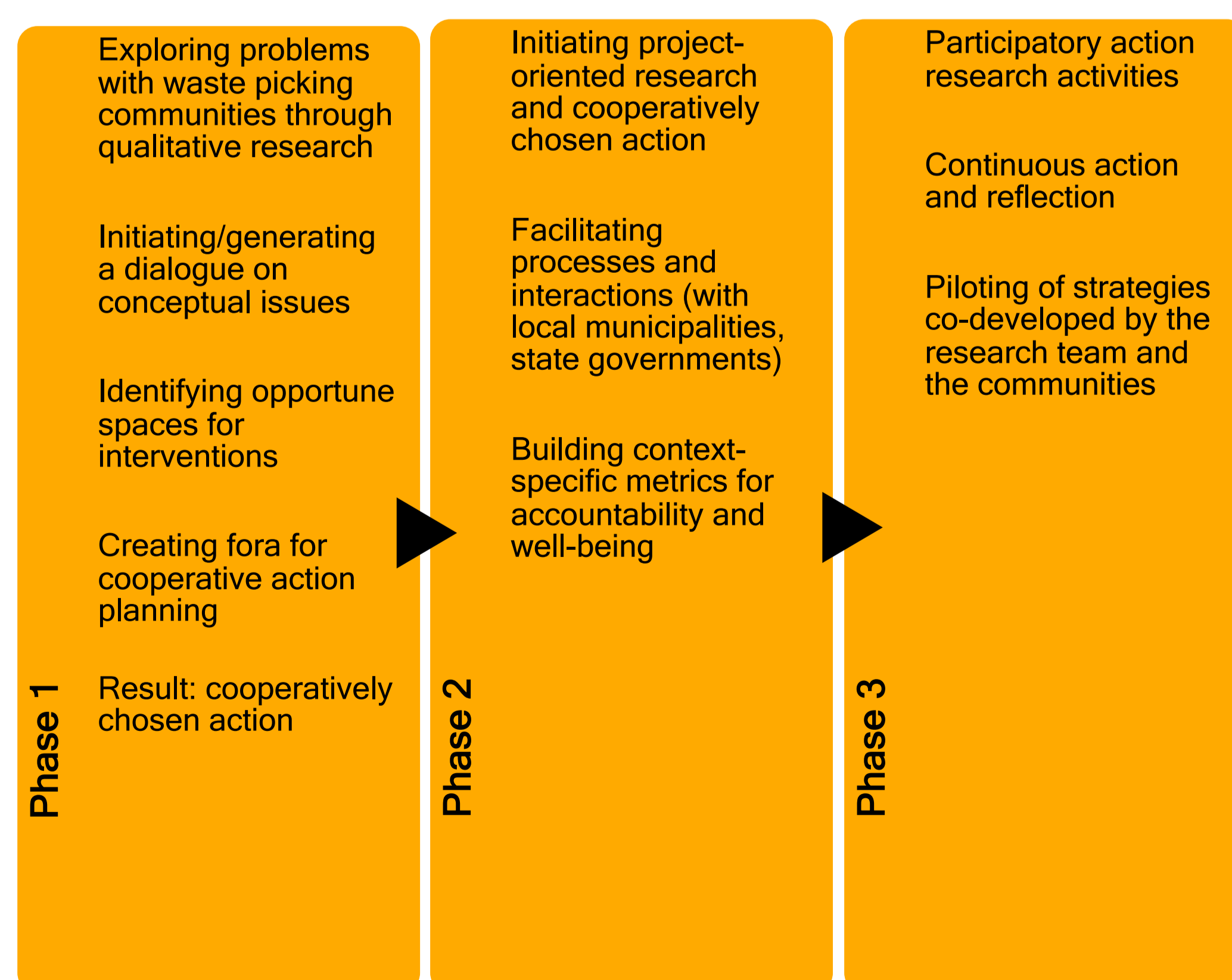
Collaboration with a non governmental organisation (NGO) - 'Hasiru Dala' - to study governance and accountability vis-à-vis livelihoods of the waste picking communities



Research programmes in ARISE

1. Conceptual and methodological development
2. Empirical case studies
3. Co-construction of accountability strategies
4. Building and sustaining an equitable partnership

Phases of research



Methods

1. Literature review, policy landscaping, & key informant interviews
2. Health and well-being survey; participant observation; in-depth interviews; focus group discussions; & individual illness narrative interviews
3. Participatory action research methods, for mapping, deliberating issues and brainstorming collective solutions: governance mapping; service mapping; social mapping; ranking/scoring exercises; problem trees; photovoice/digital storytelling; stepping stones exercises; community timelines; & participatory self-assessment

Ethical considerations

1. Power differentials in consent and assent, and in participation: minors, disadvantaged population groups
2. Conveying the distinctions among traditional research, implementation, activism, and ARISE work
3. Potential for social and professional harm to participants/co-researchers in ARISE work
4. Possibility of collectivisation and strategising not leading to success
5. Potential for tensions between researchers and civil society partners