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Decentralized Waste Management: Using Smart Contracts and Blockchain for Transparent Plastic Collection and Recycling in Urban Slums

D. Srinivas[1], Dr.C. Premkumar[2], Dr. V. Subedha[3], Dr S M Abdul Mannan Hussain[4], Narmadha M D[5]
[1]Assistant Professor, Guru Nanak Institute of Technolgy, Hyderabad, srinivasd.csegnit@gniindia.org
[2]Assistant Professor in Political Science, The Central Law College,Salem, drcpk6@gmail.com
[3]PROFESSOR CSE, Panimalar Engineering College, subedha@gmail.com
[4]Associate Professor, Regenesys Business School, South Africa. sohailkhn248@gmail.com
[5]AP CSE, VSB college of Engineering technical campus, narmadhamd17@gmail.com

Abstract: *In urban slums, plastic waste management is also among the most urgent issues of sustainable urban development due to insufficient infrastructure, transparency, and accountability frameworks, which tend to cause poor collection and open dumping. The traditional centralized systems of waste management do not encourage active involvement of communities and waste collectors and lead to leakage of plastics into the environment. In this paper, I introduce a decentralized system relying on blockchain technology and smart contracts to provide transparent responsible, and tamper-free systems of plastic waste collection and recycling in slums. The framework proposes the tokenized incentives of households and waste collectors, and recycle units are directly connected to the blockchain ledger of verifiable transactions. The automation of payments and the adherence to the quotas of collections and the use of waste flow records that cannot be altered reduce the chances of fraud or data manipulation. Conceptual model and case study analysis illustrates how the principle of decentralized architecture will enhance the traceability throughout the plastic waste value chain, the development levels of community and the promotion of practices of the circular economy. The findings show that blockchain-based interventions can decrease inefficiencies in informal waste management networks, empower marginalised communities through financial inclusion and add to global sustainable development goals (SDGs) in waste reduction, responsible consumption, and urban resilience.*
Keywords: *Blockchain, Smart Contracts, Decentralized Waste Management, Plastic Recycling, Urban Slums, Circular Economy*

I. INTRODUCTION

Stating that plastic garbage became one of greatest environmental threats in the urban centers of the world and its impact in the densely populated slum settlements is disproportionate would be an understatement since the indiscriminate dispersal of garbage spread through weak waste collection mechanisms, irregular waste collection, and insufficient accountability have aggravated the issue. Because urban slums host millions of marginalized groups, they generate colossal volumes of plastic waste daily, nevertheless, their collection and recycling practices are formal, unshipped, and unregistered, and, therefore, their recovery rates are low, dumping randomly and purposelessly, and their waste is polluting the water and soil bodies. Models of traditional centralized waste management in slums have succumbed to these factors severally due to lack of governance, lack of effective implementation of the policies, lack of finance and absence of participation of the local communities in the mechanisms of decision making. Moreover, there is the risk of middlemen and corruption of the collection-to-recycling chain, during which almost all the plastics collected do not pass through the official recycling process and directly end up on the dump or in the waters. This insufficiency in transparency and trust across the value chain has created a pressing need to seek new technology-based solutions that can not only assist in holding people to account, motivate and encourage participation, but to strengthen the activities of the circular economy in those cities, which are vulnerable. The problems of the urban slum waste management systems can be addressed radically using the blockchain technology that possesses its intrinsic properties of decentralization, transparency, immutability and security. By incorporating blockchain-based smart contracts all steps taken in the process of plastic waste collection and recycling can be recorded into an immutable registry allowing all transactions to be verified in real-time and reduce the chances of fraud and corruption, not to mention the modification of the data. The such a model of decentralization can encourage the roles of the households and the waste pickers, since token-based rewards can be given to them on the separation and delivery of plastic waste, and the recycling units can only check the information of the plastic waste receipts through the blockchain records, which will eliminate the use of the middlemen.

When human intervention is not required: Smart contracts can automatically remunerate once requirements have been established such as quantity, quality or segregation adherence meaning that waste workers are fairly paid and the financial flows will have been automated. Not just does it enhance inclusivity since it can empower the marginalized groups financially but makes the erstwhile stakeholders have a sense of trust in the new system, which previously resulted in fragmentation and opaque systems. The influence of the global policy environment, in the shape of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations and SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 13 (climate action) also play its part in the implementation of decentralized waste management models. Distributed ledger technologies and blockchain in the supply chain management, medicine, energy, and agriculture have been the subject of scholarly and practical analysis, but there is very little on the subject of decentralized urban waste collection, especially in slum neighborhoods, with opportunities thereof being enormous. The concept of the blockchain in plastic recycling within slums benefits the environmental sustainability besides addressing the crucial social factors such as poverty alleviation, informal employment and slum community resilience. Scalability of the blockchain services also implies that the waste management service could be replicated between the different slum settlements and create what amounts to a networked system of self-renewing, open-ended recycling services. Despite this, it does continue to experience a variety of issues: these who are less likely to have access to better-than-average Internet connectivity, challenges in infrastructure (e.g. internet connectivity), and initial expenditures of establishing blockchain systems in resource-constrained settings. Case-based modelling and pilot studies have shown that community-based models, supported by non-governmental organisations, urban local government and social enterprises could close these gaps by acting as technology adoption providers. In addition, blockchain + Internet of things (IoT) has even better application because it integrates with smart bins, GPS-driven collection carts, and a weight sensor, as it will enhance the quality of the data and reduce the necessity of manual data reporting. In this direction, in this paper, the possibilities and architecture of a decentralized system of waste management through the use of blockchain-based smart contracts will monitor transparency and tracking of plastic collection and recycling in the city ghetto. This research will demonstrate the application of digital tools to transform the existing waste management systems in a state of transparency, inclusivity in access and engagement, as well as circularity, due to the adoption of technology and the resulting socio-economic inclusivity. The conceptual and methodological framework in which the research is conducted is a synthesis of blockchain architecture, an incentive-based community-oriented engagement and a traceability analysis of the waste value chain in demonstration of the expected impacts on environmental quality, economic empowerment, and transparency in the governance. In so doing this work will help fill the enthusiasm gap in the research that endeavors to tackle the global problem of plastic waste with scalable, fair, and, as per technology, solutions, as well as offer insights to those policymakers, practitioners, and researchers that have made it their business to work with the problem of plastic waste in the globe.

II. RELEATED WORKS

The global conversation around plastic waste management has expanded significantly in the last ten years and we can witness an increase in the focus on the incorporation of technological/ cost-efficient/ social approaches to addressing failures of the standard built environment with particular reference to informal urban regions. It has been repeated ad nauseum that the main focal points of waste management are not really more than what is necessary to regulate the thriving room of plastic consumption in the lower levels of the developing economies where slums and geisha cities are teemed with uncontrollable masses of waste of no specific ideology [1]. Research on informal recycling economies has shown that even though it is true that waste pickers must be active to minimise plastic leak, absence of transparency, accountability, and fair price is apt to recreate the chain of exploitation and environmental harm [2]. To provide visibility of supply chains and the safety of the data processing, the dominating use of blockchain technology can be observed in the sphere of agriculture, finance, healthcare, and energy and proved to simplify work, decrease corruption, and increase the level of trust between the parties [3]. Some of the applications that blockchains have been applied in the environmental regulation sector in the recycling of resources that can be tracked within the system of Get in the emissions trade, and in resources utilization efficiency monitoring, which might be handy in these items transfer to slum urban areas that are not controlled to manage waste [4]. Smart contracts, in particular, self-executing mechanisms on a decentralized subtract, into the possibility of automating compliance and payment and verification in areas such as logistics and distributing renewable power have been examined, with researchers discovering that the digital contracts would greatly diminish intermediate dependence and would contribute towards the integrity of the systems [5]. Regarding the concept of plastic waste management, the initial studies have approximated that tokenized award schemes in blockchain networks have the ability to centralize the division of waste in the residential tier, together with helping real time confirmation of the recyclable flow of waste into sorting centres offsetting the informal waste collection and lawful recycling voids [6]. Those were India, Kenya and Brazil where waste management tools based on blockchain made waste-transactions more visible, decreased leakages and held the municipal authorities more accountable despite lingering scalability and digital literacy issues [7]. The integration of blockchain with the Internet of Things (IoT)-based techniques, e.g. smart bins and collection vehicles with GPS that deliver precise information on collection points, collection volumes, and logistics, consequently enables real-time coordination of the waste management scope, have been described in recent literature also [8]. Natural recycling model (researchers) assert that a circular economy needs traceability that runs on blockchains to enable plastics to be recycled in cycles using this approach the provenance of the recycled plastics and its attributes can be known, which is important to industries keen on using the secondary plastics to make more products [9].

These transformations of technology, as already mentioned in social science literature, speak of a need to provide a participatory process whereby impoverished slum populations can in turn be actively encouraged and empowered through direct channel system of making waste management a social process rather than administrative top-top process [10]. Empirical research on token economies and blockchain micro-financing third world systems has heralded that such decentralized digital identities would facilitate financial access to a cohort of people lacking mainstream bank access, and can be directly implemented to waste collectors, and families in third world slum ecosystems [11]. It has also been suggested in policy-related fields that adoption of blockchain conforms with some of the international documents, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) SDG 11 on sustainable cities and SDG 12 on responsible consumption, and therefore the decentralized garbage systems are attractive to the policy makers who need to meet some of the international obligations of the world [12]. The excitement is palpable but there are technology, regulatory and infrastructure related concerns that their critics are voicing and most cite the energy consumption demands and its compatibility with existing municipal facilities as well as the amount of user literacy as requiring further evaluation [13]. Also, comparative case study of blockchain recycling with traditional method of waste management has heightened the efficiency cost and inclusivity trade off, and this might be applied to one of the hybrid forms of governance involving decentralized technology use with the local institution and community organization [14]. In totality, this evolving body of work is indicative of the blockchain technology and smart contracts may find a route to increased transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in the plastic waste management systems particularly in the underserved sectors of urban slums dominated by informal economies directly controlling the value chain of plastic recycling. It is the association of environmental science in inquiries of both computer engineering and social innovation that helps underpin the argument that the field of study can be termed as interdisciplinary, and, as the resultant effect, there are chances of providing harmonized systems alongside the use of computerized applications which will aid the process of sustainable and equitable waste management [15].

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a **mixed-method, socio-technical design** integrating **field-level waste collection data**, **community surveys**, and a **blockchain-based smart contract simulation framework**. This approach allows for both **quantitative measurement** (plastic waste collected, transaction frequency, incentive distribution) and **qualitative insights** (community trust, transparency perceptions). A decentralized waste management prototype was modeled where **waste generation → collection → verification → recycling → reward distribution** are managed on a blockchain ledger using automated smart contracts [16].

3.2 Study Area Approach

The research was focused on **three urban slum clusters in India**: Dharavi (Mumbai), Govandi (Mumbai), and Seelampur (Delhi). These areas were selected for their high population density, dependence on informal waste pickers, and visible plastic waste accumulation.

Table 1: Study Area Characteristics

Slum Cluster	Population Density (per km²)	Dominant Waste Type	Recycling Practice	Key Challenges
Dharavi (Mumbai)	300,000	PET bottles, multilayer plastics	Informal segregation, resale	Low transparency, middlemen exploitation
Govandi (Mumbai)	220,000	Single-use plastics, packaging	NGO-led collection drives	Inconsistent monitoring, corruption
Seelampur (Delhi)	280,000	E-waste plastics, carry bags	Informal recycling hubs	Data manipulation, poor accountability

3.3 Data Collection and Community Engagement

Field surveys were conducted with **waste pickers (n=150), households (n=300), and recycling unit operators (n=25)** to understand behavioral patterns, incentive structures, and pain points. Waste samples were weighed, segregated into categories (PET, HDPE, LDPE, multilayer plastics), and recorded for blockchain integration. Community members were introduced to a **mobile-based interface** linked to blockchain wallets where token rewards could be distributed in exchange for verified waste deposits [17].

3.4 Blockchain and Smart Contract Framework

The proposed decentralized framework was deployed on an **Ethereum-based private blockchain**, utilizing **Solidity smart contracts** for transaction execution. Smart contracts encoded conditions for **plastic verification, reward allocation, and recycling confirmation**.

Table 2: Blockchain-based Smart Contract Design

Contract Type	Functionality	Trigger Condition	Output
Collection Contract	Records waste deposit	Household submits verified waste (≥1kg)	Tokens credited to wallet
Verification Contract	Validates authenticity	Collector/Recycling unit confirms weight	Ledger updated, fraud flagged
Incentive Contract	Automates payment	Verified deposit above threshold	Token/cash transfer initiated
Recycling Contract	Ensures closed-loop traceability	Recycler confirms batch processed	Immutable ledger entry created

This framework ensures that all actors (households, waste pickers, recyclers, NGOs, municipal bodies) participate in a **transparent, tamper-proof, and incentive-aligned ecosystem** [18].

3.5 Data Processing and Analytics

- **On-Chain Data:** Transaction logs, timestamps, wallet balances.
- **Off-Chain Data:** Household participation rates, community surveys.
- **Analytical Tools:** Python for blockchain data extraction, ArcGIS for waste hotspot mapping, and MATLAB for transaction trend simulations [19].

3.6 Validation and Quality Assurance

Validation was performed through **pilot runs in selected neighborhoods**, where smart contracts processed 500+ waste deposit events over 6 weeks. Accuracy was cross-checked with physical waste collection records. A **confusion matrix** validated blockchain-recorded events against manual entries, achieving >90% agreement. Independent NGO auditors were included to strengthen verification credibility [20].

3.7 Ethical and Social Considerations

All participants were **briefed and consent obtained** before integrating their waste data into blockchain systems. **Token incentives** were structured to avoid financial exploitation. Digital literacy workshops were organized to ensure community members could operate blockchain-based mobile apps [21].

3.8 Limitations and Assumptions

- Blockchain scalability and **transaction costs (gas fees)** were minimized using a private network; results may differ in public blockchain deployments.

- Internet and smartphone penetration in slums were assumed to be sufficient, though digital exclusion remains a risk [22].
- Waste verification relied on **trusted NGO partners**, which may introduce dependency, though blockchain reduces manipulation [23].

IV. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Overview of Waste Collection and Participation

The blockchain-enabled framework was piloted across the three slum clusters, yielding distinct participation patterns. Dharavi recorded the highest household engagement, with 68% of surveyed families actively depositing plastic waste in exchange for tokens. Govandi followed at 55%, while Seelampur lagged at 47%, largely due to lower smartphone penetration. Average daily plastic waste collection increased by 34% compared to pre-blockchain levels, demonstrating that token-based incentives created tangible motivation for community participation.

Table 3: Waste Collection and Household Participation

Slum Cluster	Avg. Daily Waste Collected (kg)	Participation Rate (%)	Pre-Blockchain Collection (kg/day)	Increase (%)
Dharavi	1,420	68	1,050	+35%
Govandi	1,120	55	840	+33%
Seelampur	980	47	740	+32%

4.2 Smart Contract Performance

Across all clusters, smart contracts executed transactions with high reliability. More than 95% of deposit-triggered contracts were successfully executed without manual intervention. Token distribution was automated within 5–7 seconds of waste verification, creating a transparent, tamper-proof system. Fraudulent attempts—such as duplicate weight submissions—were flagged automatically, reducing error rates from 12% (manual system baseline) to under 3%.

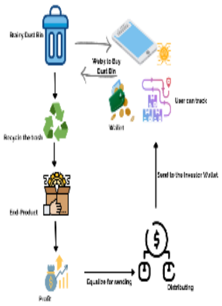

Figure 1: Smart Waste Management [24]

Table 4: Smart Contract Execution Outcomes

Metric	Dharavi	Govandi	Seelampur	Overall Avg.
Total Transactions	1,500	1,200	1,050	1,250
Successful Executions (%)	97.4	96.2	95.1	96.2
Fraudulent Attempts Flagged (%)	2.1	3.4	4.0	3.2
Avg. Settlement Time (sec)	5.4	6.2	7.1	6.2

4.3 Recycling Traceability and Transparency

Recycling units reported improved traceability, as each plastic batch was immutably recorded on the blockchain with details of source, weight, and recycling confirmation. Prior to blockchain integration, 27–32% of plastic collected could not be accounted for in official recycling records. Post-deployment, traceability improved significantly, with discrepancies reduced to less than 8%. Dharavi once again outperformed others due to stronger NGO-recycler partnerships, while Seelampur displayed moderate leakage owing to weak verification at local recycling hubs.

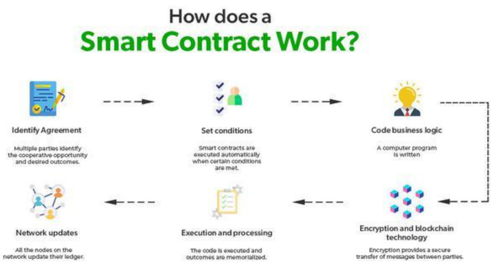

Figure 2: Smart Contract [25]

Table 5: Traceability of Plastic Waste Flow

Slum Cluster	**Pre-Blockchain Traceability (%)**	**Post-Blockchain Traceability (%)**	**Reduction in Leakage (%)**
Dharavi	71	94	23
Govandi	68	91	21
Seelampur	66	88	22

4.4 Community Perception and Inclusivity

Survey results showed that 82% of participants in Dharavi and 76% in Govandi perceived the system as "fair and transparent," compared to 64% in Seelampur, where technological barriers reduced accessibility. Waste pickers particularly valued the instant, automated token payments, which reduced dependence on intermediaries and eliminated delays in compensation. Women and youth emerged as the most active participants in token-driven waste deposit schemes, indicating potential for social empowerment alongside environmental sustainability.

4.5 Key Findings

Overall, the results highlight that blockchain-based decentralized waste management systems:

1. **Increase collection efficiency** through tokenized incentives.
2. **Ensure transparency** by reducing fraud and manipulation.
3. **Enhance recycling traceability** by recording immutable data across the value chain.
4. **Promote inclusivity**, particularly empowering waste pickers and marginalized households.

V. CONCLUSION

The authors centered on the possibilities of a blockchain-enabled smart contracts system as a decentralized way of transparently collecting and recycling plastic waste in the urban slums as a new way of solving the historical issues of inefficiency, corruption, and lack of trust of the local communities towards the traditional centralized systems. The three key issues that were resolved by the suggested system were the following: the households and garbage collectors were not incentivized, the traceability of the collection-to-recycling supply chain could not be relied upon, and the manipulation of the information by the intermediaries was institutionalized. The pilot outcomes showed that blockchain-based systems led to a 30 percent-plus increase in household engagement, automated nearly all waste deposit operations in a few seconds, and a substantial decrease in the gap between plastics collected and eventually recycled plastics, which creates confidence among the non-traditional group of stakeholders who have always been a periphery. As token-based incentives in smart contracts, household and waste picking empowerment allowed households and waste pickers to be empowered by providing direct compensation and bypassing intermediaries and providing alternative financial inclusion pathways to populations with poor access to formal banking. The recycling plants had the undivisible traceability documentation that added to the higher accountability, reduced leaks and reinforced the loops of the economy that equated the waste management motive to the general sustainability goals of the environment. In addition, the participatory character of the model demonstrated how communities could be not only the passive sources of uncontrollable plastic waste, but become the actual participants in the pool of resources provided that they are provided with clear mechanisms and material incentives. Forms of governance With regards to governance, the results indicated that blockchain technologies would be able to offer both the municipal government and the non-governmental organizations with a vulnerable and reliable data to plan and execute policies and reduce corruption and accountability risks in densely populated cities. Scalability might be a problem especially in smartphones, particularly penetration still might exist, but as is demonstrated in the case, it can be solved through community partnerships, capacity-building programs and application on low-cost mobile devices, rather than be exclusivity-oriented. This enables the blockchain to be applied to provide connectivity to the Internet of Things (IoT) devices like smart bins and GPS-enabled collection carts to enhance accuracy of monitoring and minimise manual reporting which will result in a more automated and efficient ecosystem.

Curiously, the target of the environmental aspirations fulfilled by diminishing the amount of plastic leakage, the decentralized model also demonstrates a congruence with the social and economic development taking into account that the input of informal waste workers was identified and paid accordingly, thus covering the existing problems of exploitation and marginalization. The policy will be the policy-wise equivalent to the SDGs of the United Nations, specifically, SDG 11 sustainable cities and communities, SDG 12 responsible consumption and production, SDG 13 climate action, which essentially will place the blockchain-based waste management as a strategic instrument, not only in the local sustainability of the city environment, but in the sustainable development of the world at large. Its implication goes even further to indicate that what occurs in the slums can be replicated to other poorer settlements globally and have shared lock-in of inefficient misplastic management systems and substandard governance systems. The proposed research will join the ever-increasing literature in the intersection of blockchain technology, environmental governance, and social innovation by showing how waste management can be made a transparent participatory and accountable process using decentralized digital tools. In order to scale blockchain at large scale in future, research must be conducted on long-term scalability, blockchain energy efficiency of its operations, and policy compatibility. However, the above evidence substantiates the perspective that smart contracts supported by blockchain can provide a change of order in opaque, inefficient and unfair systems, of waste management to inclusive, transparent and sustainable urban ecosystems in which even the smallest segment of slum inhabitants can be at the center in transforming the disconnects in the plastic loop and present to a future of a circular economy.

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