

The dynamics of the scavenger profession: Economic motivation, social integration, and sustainability

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Abstract

Indonesia's waste management crisis, being one of the world's largest contributors of solid waste, highlights the strategic importance of the informal sector, particularly scavengers, who supply more than 80% of recyclable materials yet continue to face social stigma and systemic marginalization. This study examines the motivation and sustainability of the scavenger profession at the Angsanah Landfill (TPA) in Pamekasan, a distinctive context where scavengers experience full social integration without discrimination. Guided by Rational Choice Theory and Economic Behavior Theory, this research adopts a qualitative phenomenological approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with seven active scavengers, landfill managers, and village authorities, supported by field observation and documentation. The findings show that scavengers choose this occupation based on rational economic considerations; the prospect of relatively high earnings (up to IDR 2.8 million per month), low entry barriers, and flexible working hours. Socially, they benefit from strong community integration and the absence of negative stigma, which contrasts sharply with conditions commonly reported in major urban landfills. Despite these advantages, the long-term sustainability of the profession is threatened by increasing upstream waste-sorting initiatives, which significantly reduce the volume of recyclable

waste that reaches the landfill. The study calls for policy interventions aimed at formalizing scavenger organizations through cooperatives, strengthening social protection, and integrating scavengers into circular economy frameworks, while considering the unique socio-cultural context of local communities to ensure inclusive and sustainable waste governance.

Keywords: *scavengers; rational choice theory; circular economy; informal sector; social integration*

Introduction

Waste management has emerged as a global crisis with far-reaching environmental and social implications (Ilhami et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the country that recognized as one of the world's largest contributors of plastic and solid waste (Angelia, 2022), the urgency of establishing an effective and sustainable waste governance framework has become increasingly evident. The national government has responded through a series of policy initiatives, including the 2023 National Waste Awareness Day (HPSN) campaign themed "Zero Waste, Zero Emission," which encourages the revalorization of waste as a potential economic resource (Menteri LHK, 2023). At the regional level, similar initiatives have been adopted, such as Bone Regency's Local Regulation No. 9 of 2023 on Waste Management, emphasizing waste reduction through recycling, reuse, and community-based initiatives (Pemkab Bone, 2023). These policies highlight the essential role of actors across the waste management chain, particularly those operating within the informal sector.

Despite their critical contributions, scavengers often encounter contradictory realities. On the one hand, research consistently shows that they supply more than 80% of the recyclable materials used by Indonesia's recycling industries (Budiman, 2023), positioning them as indispensable agents within the circular economy (LCDI, 2023). They bridge the structural gap between public waste services and private recycling industries, performing a function that formal institutions have yet to replicate effectively (Tampubolon, 2025). On the other hand, scavengers frequently face profound vulnerabilities, ranging from social stigma and unstable

income to limited access to legal identity documents and unsafe working conditions without adequate social protection (Kamaratih & Alamanda, 2019).

Against this backdrop, the Angsanah Landfill (TPA) in Pamekasan presents a compelling and contrasting case. Unlike scavenger communities commonly depicted in studies of major urban landfills, who are often portrayed as marginalized, transient, or segregated from mainstream society, scavengers at Angsanah are long-standing members of surrounding villages. They are socially integrated, treated with dignity, and generally perceived as equal to other professions such as farming and trading. This unique socio-cultural environment challenges dominant narratives that frame scavenging as an occupation shaped solely by poverty, marginalization, or lack of alternatives.

This study seeks to explore the motivations and sustainability of the scavenger profession at the Angsanah Landfill using Rational Choice Theory and Economic Behavior Theory as analytical lenses. These frameworks offer a structured way to understand how individuals make decisions based on cost-benefit assessments, perceived opportunities, and structural constraints. The objective is not only to document the experiences of scavengers but also to interpret how rationality operates within the socio-economic context of an informal yet socially accepted occupation. By doing so, the study aims to enrich theoretical discussions on informal labor, contribute to policy-oriented debates on inclusive waste governance, and provide empirical insights relevant to the development of socially grounded circular economy strategies.

Literature review

Rational Choice Theory (RCT) provides a conceptual framework that views individuals as purposeful actors who make decisions based on logical evaluations of costs and benefits. According to Harrington et al. (2006), individuals are assumed to select actions that maximize personal utility within the constraints they face. Ritzer (2005) notes that this perspective emphasizes the agency of individuals,

positing that behavior can be understood through the goals, preferences, and beliefs that guide decision-making (Ritzer, 2005).

James S. Coleman, one of the most influential proponents of RCT, argues that actions are driven by attempts to achieve specific objectives that individuals value. A choice is considered rational if it aligns with these goals and with the actor's beliefs about how best to realize them (Marsden, 2005). Within Max Weber's typology of social action, such decisions fall under instrumentally rational action, where individuals strategically select the most efficient means to achieve desired ends (Whimster & Lash, 2014).

In the context of labor choices within informal sectors, RCT has been widely applied to explain how individuals evaluate available opportunities and constraints, including income potential, working conditions, and skill requirements. This framework provides a useful analytical lens for understanding why individuals may choose occupations that, on the surface, appear undesirable or stigmatized, such as scavenging, but which may offer tangible economic advantages (De Jaegher & Froese, 2009).

Economic Behavior Theory emerges as a more specialized extension of RCT, focusing specifically on how economic incentives shape employment decisions. Jefferson explains that individuals assess opportunities based on expected income, job security, and labor market conditions (Jefferson, 2018). This theory posits that an individual's decision in selecting employment is influenced by three primary considerations: income potential, employment opportunities, and labor market conditions.

Income is often the most decisive factor. Individuals tend to choose occupations that offer higher potential earnings, even if such jobs require heavier physical burdens or longer working hours (Aeni, 2019). Employment opportunities are the secondary factor that influences individuals' choices of work. Employment decisions are shaped by the perceived likelihood of being hired and the long-term prospects associated with a job. Occupations with low barriers to

entry, minimal credential requirements, and relatively stable work opportunities become attractive, particularly for individuals with limited formal education (Said & Iskandar, 2020). Competitive labor markets, especially for formal jobs requiring qualifications, may deter individuals with fewer resources. Informal-sector jobs that involve minimal competition and flexible entry conditions, such as scavenging, often serve as practical alternatives (Handayani et al., 2020). Together, RCT and Economic Behavior Theory offer a structured way to interpret scavengers' decisions not merely as outcomes of poverty or compulsion, but as rational responses to economic realities and structural constraints.

Existing studies provide evidence that scavenging is not solely a consequence of socioeconomic hardship. Huzaemah's research at the Piyungan landfill shows that some scavengers possess relatively stable socio-economic conditions, with monthly incomes reaching up to IDR 2,028,000, challenging common stereotypes that frame scavengers as entirely destitute (Huzaemah, 2020). These findings highlight the economic rationality embedded in the occupation, which, despite its social stigma, can yield meaningful financial returns.

However, literature also reveals significant social variation. Research in Jakarta and Makassar, for example, shows that scavengers often experience deep social marginalization, being perceived as dirty, undesirable, or socially unfit (Barakati, 2021; Kadir, 2023). Such stigma reduces opportunities for social interaction and reinforces their exclusion from mainstream economic and social life. These dynamics are frequently linked to the precarious settlements around large urban landfills, where many scavengers are migrants or transient workers.

Recent literature increasingly recognizes the role of scavengers as key actors within the circular economy. They perform essential environmental services by reducing waste volumes in landfills and recovering valuable materials. A study conducted at Bantargebang, Indonesia's largest landfill, reports that scavenger activities reduce daily waste accumulation by approximately 12.55% (Ayuna et al., 2022). This demonstrates their significant contribution to national recycling chains

and environmental sustainability. Despite their pivotal role, scavengers continue to operate outside formal waste management systems. Government support remains limited, particularly in terms of social protection, occupational safety, and formal recognition. Scholars argue that integrating scavengers into formal mechanisms, such as cooperatives or municipal recycling programs, could enhance both environmental outcomes and the socioeconomic well-being of scavengers (Budiman, 2023).

Research methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences, motivations, and rational considerations underlying scavengers' occupational decisions at the Angsanah Landfill. Phenomenology is particularly suited to investigations that seek to understand how individuals interpret their everyday realities, allowing researchers to capture subjective meanings that may not be observable through quantitative measures (Nuryana et al., 2019). As emphasized by Creswell, phenomenological inquiry enables the reconstruction of participants' experiences from their own perspectives, thereby offering deeper insight into the essence of a phenomenon. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi (Weyant, 2022).

The research was conducted at the Angsanah Landfill (TPA Angsanah), located in Angsanah Village, Palengaan District, Pamekasan Regency. The landfill serves as the primary waste disposal point for several surrounding communities and functions as the central workplace for the scavengers participating in this study. The site was chosen deliberately due to its unique socio-cultural context, where scavengers are socially integrated members of nearby villages, contrasting sharply with marginalized scavenger settlements typically found in large urban landfills.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which allows researchers to intentionally choose individuals who possess direct relevance to the research objectives (Flick, 2017). Informants included seven active scavengers representing diverse demographic backgrounds, alongside landfill managers and local village authorities. This approach ensured the inclusion of participants with firsthand experience and deep engagement with the daily practices and challenges of scavenging at the landfill.

Data were collected through three primary methods: semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation (Braun et al., 2017). Interviews were conducted to elicit detailed narratives regarding participants' motivations, decision-making processes, risk perceptions, and social experiences related to scavenging. The semi-structured format provided flexibility to explore emerging themes while maintaining consistency across interviews. Observations were carried out directly at the landfill to document scavengers' routines, interactions, working conditions, and environmental context. This method provided contextual depth and allowed for the triangulation of interview data. Supporting documents, including landfill administrative data, demographic records, and relevant government policies, were collected to enhance the reliability of findings and situate the research within broader structural conditions.

To ensure the credibility and dependability of the findings, the study employed triangulation of sources and methods. This involved cross-verifying information obtained from different participants, comparing interview data with observational notes, and contextualizing findings with official documents. Such methodological rigor strengthened the trustworthiness of the interpretations drawn (Achjar et al., 2023). The data analysis was carried out in stages, commencing with data preparation, followed by data categorization, and subsequently developed into a conceptual framework aimed at identifying inter-theme relationships in order to construct a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This framework was then interpreted and

validated by linking the empirical findings with rational choice theory and pertinent scholarly literature (Hashimov, 2015).

Result and discussion

Living realities of scavengers at the Angsanah landfill

The Angsanah Landfill (TPA Angsanah), located in Angsanah Village, Palengaan District of Pamekasan Regency, was inaugurated in 2017 and is administered by the Pamekasan Environmental Agency. Covering an area of 10.65 hectares, the landfill receives an average of 1,000 tons of waste per month, making it a central node in the region's waste management system. Administrative data for 2024 indicate that 100 scavengers are formally registered, comprising 58 men and 42 women. However, only around 40 scavengers actively work on a daily basis, with the remainder engaging periodically depending on personal schedules, household responsibilities, and seasonal economic conditions.

The scavengers originate from four nearby villages (Klampar, Samatan, Rangpenang, and Angsanah) with the highest concentration coming from Klampar and Angsanah due to their proximity. Their daily activities follow the rhythm of waste delivery: most scavengers work in the early morning (06:00–09:00) and late afternoon (15:00–18:00), although some remain active into the night when waste trucks occasionally arrive. Notably, there are no formal rules governing working hours, access, or obligations. Scavengers enter and exit the landfill at will, reflecting the occupation's highly flexible and informal character. The landfill administration records their names primarily for data purposes, especially regarding the distribution of social assistance or provision of personal protective equipment (PPE).

Unlike scavenger communities in major urban landfills, who are often portrayed as marginalized, transient, or socially isolated, the scavengers at Angsanah are well-integrated members of their local communities. They participate in social gatherings, community celebrations, neighborhood activities,

and enjoy equal access to public services such as healthcare and education. Community members do not stigmatize or otherize them; instead, scavenging is perceived as one among many livelihood strategies, comparable to farming, small-scale trading, or home-based craftwork. This socio-cultural acceptance distinguishes Angsanah from urban contexts, where scavengers frequently face discrimination, social exclusion, and negative stereotyping.

From the perspective of the scavengers themselves, the occupation is viewed as morally legitimate and socially meaningful. They consistently express that any form of work aimed at earning lawful income is honorable. Since the materials they collect are abandoned waste, they regard their activities as both legally and religiously permissible. Several participants articulated a sense of pride in contributing to environmental cleanliness and waste reduction, an aspect that the general public seldom considers. As one participant noted, scavengers “serve the community just as teachers, drivers, or traders do,” emphasizing the dignity they attach to their labor.

To illustrate the demographic distribution and participation levels more systematically, the table below summarizes key statistics derived from the landfill’s administrative records:

Table 1. Registered and active scavengers at Angsanah landfill (2024)

Category	Data
Total registered scavengers	100 persons
Active daily scavengers	~40 persons
Gender distribution	58 men, 42 women
Origin villages	Klampar, Samatan, Rangpenang, Angsanah
Landfill capacity	10.65 hectares
Monthly waste volume	±1,000 tons

The combination of flexible working arrangements, social acceptance, and community integration makes Angsanah an atypical case within Indonesian scavenging studies. Rather than being characterized by isolation or stigma,

scavengers here are embedded within rural social structures, enabling them to maintain multiple livelihood roles and sustain their dignity while engaging in an informal occupation.

Motivation to become a scavenger (rational choice perspective)

The decision to work as a scavenger at the Angsanah Landfill is shaped by a series of rational economic considerations that align with the core propositions of Rational Choice Theory and Economic Behavior Theory. These frameworks posit that individuals evaluate alternatives by comparing potential benefits, costs, and opportunity structures before selecting the option that maximizes their utility. Field data indicate that scavengers at Angsanah make occupational choices based on a pragmatic assessment of income potential, employment opportunity, and the low barriers to entry associated with scavenging.

Income emerges as the most salient motivator. Scavengers earn money by collecting and selling sorted recyclable materials, such as plastics, metals, cans, and paper, to local collectors. The amount earned varies considerably, influenced by individual work intensity, market price fluctuations, and the volume of recyclable materials available on any given day. Interviews reveal substantial variations: Sayadi reported weekly earnings between IDR 500,000 and 700,000, with peak monthly earnings reaching IDR 3,000,000, depending on material volume and market conditions. Matrawi, by contrast, typically earns IDR 20,000–50,000 per day, or approximately IDR 140,000–350,000 per week, assuming daily work. Some scavengers earn less than IDR 100,000 per week, placing them near or below the local poverty line based on BPS standards (Pamekasan Poverty Line, March 2020: IDR 357,074) (Statistika, 2022).

Despite this variability, scavenging remains attractive due to its potential for relatively high returns, especially for persistent workers. This mirrors findings from the Piyungan Landfill, where Huzaemah (2020) recorded monthly earnings of IDR 2,028,000, demonstrating that scavenging, despite its informal nature and social stigma, can be a viable livelihood strategy with significant income-

generating potential (Huzaemah, 2020). The comparative income data are summarized below:

Tabel 2. Comparison of scavenger income at Angsanah and Piyungan landfills

Location	Source	Weekly Income	Monthly Income
Angsanah	Interview data	IDR 140,000–350,000	IDR 560,000–1,400,000
Angsanah (most diligent workers)	Interview data	IDR 500,000–700,000	IDR 2,000,000–2,800,000
Piyungan	Journal data	IDR 507,000	IDR 2,028,000

Another compelling factor that rationalizes the choice to engage in scavenging is its flexibility and low opportunity cost. Most scavengers do not consider scavenging their primary occupation. Instead, they combine it with other forms of work such as farming, batik production, construction labor, small-scale trading, or household services. For example, Zainuddin and Abd. Bari, both batik artisans, resort to scavenging during periods when batik orders decrease. Rosidah supplements her household income to support her husband's insufficient earnings. Even landfill employees with contractual positions participate in scavenging to supplement their income.

For some individuals, scavenging serves as a transitional occupation. Halimah, the youngest participant, described scavenging as a temporary activity undertaken to help her family while seeking more stable employment. Meanwhile, Mansur, a former office worker of advanced age, emphasized that scavenging was the most feasible option available due to its simplicity and proximity to his home.

From an economic behavior standpoint, the motivations to choose scavenging can be understood through a combination of push factors (such as unemployment, low education, and limited access to formal work) and pull factors, such as the continuous availability of recyclable materials, low entry barriers, and income flexibility (Nim, 2015). These factors can be summarized within the theoretical framework of push–pull dynamics:

Tabel 3. Push and pull factors shaping scavenger occupational choice

Theoretical dimension	Push factors	Pull factors	Empirical evidence
Income	Need to meet basic living costs	Potentially high returns	Sayadi earns up to IDR 700,000/week; Rosidah supplements insufficient household income
Employment opportunities	High unemployment, limited formal jobs	Abundant recyclable materials	Elderly individuals like Mansur find scavenging accessible due to low skill requirements
Labor market conditions	Low education, low competitiveness in formal sectors	Very low entry costs; no capital needed	Scavenging requires only persistence; minimal risk of loss

The findings collectively demonstrate that the choice to work as a scavenger at Angsanah is not merely a consequence of socio-economic marginalization but represents a deliberate and rational strategy to maximize household income, manage livelihood uncertainty, and access a flexible form of work embedded within local economic and social structures.

Risks and Challenges

Daily exposure to heterogeneous waste materials poses persistent health and safety challenges. Scavengers frequently come into direct contact with hazardous items such as broken glass, sharp metal fragments, rusted cans, and chemical residues. Interviews revealed several cases of injuries, including puncture wounds caused by shattered glass and cuts from corroded metal scraps. Respiratory problems are also common; some scavengers, such as Abd. Bari, reported experiencing chronic coughing and shortness of breath, while Rosidah noted recurrent headaches after prolonged exposure to landfill gases and dust.

Despite these conditions, awareness of health risks tends to be low. Many scavengers normalize illness as an expected consequence of their work, treating symptoms as trivial and unrelated to occupational hazards. This resignation is partly due to limited access to health information and partly shaped by the cultural

tendency to accept physical discomfort as a routine feature of livelihood struggles. While the landfill management occasionally provides personal protective equipment, such as gloves and rubber boots, the supply remains insufficient and inconsistently distributed, forcing scavengers to rely on improvised or inadequate protection.

Beyond physical hazards, scavengers face considerable economic uncertainty, primarily due to the volatile nature of recyclable material prices. The value of plastic, metal, and paper fluctuates in response to broader market dynamics, including changes in industrial demand, fuel prices, and regional supply chain disruptions. When prices drop, scavengers experience direct and immediate reductions in daily income, with no institutional mechanisms to buffer these shocks.

Moreover, the availability of recyclable waste has decreased, creating additional pressure on scavengers. This decline is largely attributable to upstream waste-sorting initiatives. Waste separation is increasingly practiced at the household level and by institutional waste generators. For instance, Pesantren Bata-Bata, one of the major suppliers of waste to the landfill, now performs initial sorting before sending residual waste to TPA Angsanah. Additionally, street-level scavengers and waste collection workers often recover valuable materials before the waste reaches the landfill. As a result, the recyclable fraction arriving at Angsanah has diminished, reducing the overall volume available for landfill-based scavengers.

This multilayered competition (households, institutional sorters, street scavengers, and waste collectors) creates a funneling effect, where only the least valuable materials reach the landfill. Such conditions exacerbate income uncertainty and force scavengers to work longer hours or expand their search radius to maintain their earnings.

The reduction in recyclable waste represents a broader structural challenge to the sustainability of landfill scavenging as a livelihood strategy. While upstream

waste-sorting improves environmental outcomes and aligns with circular economy goals, it inadvertently undermines the resource base upon which scavengers depend. Several scavengers noted that valuable materials such as aluminum and copper have become increasingly rare, as they are frequently intercepted before reaching the landfill.

This dynamic creates a paradox: the more effective the waste-management system becomes at the household or institutional level, the less viable scavenging becomes as an income-generating occupation. This challenge is particularly acute in rural areas like Angsanah, where formal employment opportunities remain limited.

Sustainability of the Scavenger Profession

The sustainability of scavenging as a livelihood at the Angsanah Landfill is shaped by the interplay between waste availability, market dynamics, environmental policies, and the socio-economic conditions of the scavenger community. Although scavengers contribute meaningfully to waste reduction, their long-term livelihood security is increasingly challenged by structural changes within the waste-management ecosystem.

The Angsanah Landfill receives approximately 999 tons of waste per month, a substantial volume relative to its total operational capacity of 10.65 hectares. Within this system, scavengers play a crucial role in mitigating waste accumulation. By recovering and selling recyclable materials, they reduce the volume of waste requiring final disposal. Although specific quantitative measurements are unavailable for Angsanah, studies from comparable settings illustrate the magnitude of such contributions. Research conducted at the Bantargebang Landfill in Bekasi shows that scavengers reduce waste by an average of 12.55% per day, leading to a cumulative annual reduction of approximately 420,285 tons (Ayuna et al., 2022). This comparative evidence underscores the invisible, yet essential role scavengers play in extending landfill lifespan and improving overall waste-management efficiency.

Field observations suggest a similar, albeit unmeasured, impact at Angsanah. With around 40 scavenger's active daily, each collecting recyclable materials from incoming waste loads, their collective efforts significantly slow down the rate at which landfill space is consumed. In this sense, scavenging forms an informal yet indispensable component of the region's waste-management system, operating in parallel with formal waste-processing mechanisms.

From the viewpoint of the scavengers themselves, the occupation's sustainability is assessed in practical and immediate terms. Many consider scavenging sustainable if it continues to generate income sufficient to meet daily needs. Because the job requires no formal skills, involves no entry costs, and allows flexible working hours, scavengers perceive it as a dependable fallback option when other income sources fail. This perception is strengthened by the absence of job alternatives, particularly for elderly individuals, women with household responsibilities, and workers with limited education.

Scavengers also highlight the importance of proximity and familiarity. Since the landfill is located near their homes, commuting costs are negligible, allowing them to engage in short work intervals without sacrificing household duties or other jobs. For them, occupational sustainability is closely tied to personal adaptability: they rely on scavenging not as a profession to be pursued indefinitely, but as a livelihood buffer that can be intensified or reduced depending on household financial needs.

When assessed through a more structural and long-term lens, the sustainability of scavenging appears less secure. The decline in recyclable material availability, caused by upstream waste-sorting at the household, institutional, and street levels, has already begun to erode the resource base needed to sustain landfill scavenging. As households become more knowledgeable about waste segregation and as community waste banks grow, valuable recyclables are increasingly diverted away from landfills.

This trend is consistent with national shifts toward circular-economy models and the strengthening of local environmental regulations, which emphasize waste reduction at the source. Although these developments are beneficial for environmental preservation, they paradoxically reduce the economic viability of scavenging. If the volume of recyclable materials arriving at Angsanah continues to diminish, the number of scavengers who can sustain themselves through landfill-based recovery will inevitably decline.

The sustainability challenge becomes even more pronounced when viewed within the broader socio-economic context of rural Pamekasan. Formal employment opportunities remain limited, and many scavengers possess minimal education, restricting their mobility in the labor market. No formal policies currently exist to support scavengers in transitioning to alternative livelihoods or integrating them into formal recycling industries. Without such mechanisms, scavengers are left vulnerable to income instability and future displacement.

The findings reveal an inherent paradox: the more efficient and environmentally responsible the waste-management system becomes, the less viable scavenging becomes as a livelihood. Initiatives such as waste banks, household separation programs, and industrial recycling networks are designed to minimize landfill waste. While these innovations contribute to sustainability goals, they simultaneously undermine the informal recycling economy upon which scavengers depend.

This paradox underscores the need for inclusive waste-management policies that recognize scavengers not only as environmental actors but also as vulnerable workers whose livelihoods are affected by systemic changes. Without deliberate policy interventions, such as capacity-building programs, alternative employment pathways, or integration into formal recycling sectors, the scavenger profession at Angsanah will face increasing uncertainty.

Conclusion

This study explored the livelihood dynamics of scavengers at the Angsanah Landfill and found that scavenging in this rural context is shaped by unique social, economic, and structural conditions. Unlike the marginalization commonly reported in urban landfills, scavengers at Angsanah experience strong community acceptance and view their work as morally legitimate and socially valuable. Economically, scavenging serves as a rational strategy to supplement household income, offering flexibility, low entry barriers, and immediate financial returns, especially for individuals with limited employment opportunities.

Despite these advantages, scavenging involves significant health and economic risks. Scavengers face daily exposure to hazardous waste, inconsistent income due to fluctuating market prices, and declining availability of recyclable materials caused by increasing upstream waste-sorting practices. These structural shifts threaten the long-term sustainability of scavenging, creating a paradox in which improved environmental practices reduce the livelihood prospects of those who rely on landfill-based recovery.

Thus, while scavenging remains an important adaptive livelihood strategy for rural households, its sustainability is increasingly uncertain. Policy support, such as livelihood diversification, integration into formal recycling systems, and improved occupational protections, is necessary to ensure that environmental progress does not inadvertently deepen socio-economic vulnerability.

In conclusion, scavenging at the Angsanah Landfill represents both an economically rational and socially embedded livelihood strategy, yet one whose sustainability is increasingly challenged by systemic changes in waste-management practices. Without deliberate policy support, scavengers may face heightened precarity in the future, despite their ongoing contributions to environmental sustainability.

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