

Why Waste Trash

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Inclusive Waste Management in India - The Scenario Today

We have come a long way: Twenty one years have passed since the Bajaj Committee (1995) recommended replacing informal sector scavenging from roads and disposal grounds with organized ward-level recycling and recovery centres. In the meantime, we saw recommendations of various national rules and policies like the National Environment Policy (2006), the National Action Plan for Climate Change (2009), Plastic Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011 and E-waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011, being ignored by the municipalities. Now that the newly revised Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 (SWM Rules) elaborate on inclusion of wastepickers and lay down the duties of the waste generators, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and State Governments, we can hope for better opportunities in future for the wastepickers.

What does inclusive model mean?

The Prime Minister of India launched the Swachh Bharat Mission in October 2014 with a vision of ensuring hygiene, waste management and sanitation across the nation. One of mission's crucial objectives is "modern and scientific municipal solid waste management (SWM)". Clearly, success of this mission depends on an efficient SWM system in place. Various success stories across Indian show that an efficient SWM system is one which effectively integrates wastepickers.

For example, Hasiru Dala in Bengaluru, Karnataka integrates waste management services under the ambit of their ULB – Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). They run 32 dry waste collection centres in Bengaluru through which wastepickers are able to divert 1050 tons of waste for recycling everyday.



Safai Sena wastepicker at NDMC's Domestic Hazardous Waste Collection Centre

How the SWM Rules, 2016 are more inclusive than before

- Rule 11 of SWM Rules directs the Secretary-in-charge, Urban Development in the States and Union territories to start schemes to register waste pickers and state guidelines for integration of informal sector collectors in waste management system.

- Rule 15 directs local bodies to recognize and promote organizations of informal waste collectors and establish a system for their integration in solid waste management, including door-to-door collection (DTDC) of waste.
- Rules 15(h) directs ULBs to set up material recovery facilities (MRFs) to enable wastepickers to separate recyclables from the waste.

Why follow an inclusive model?

- Who doesn't want a cooler planet? A Chintan study shows that the informal sector in Delhi reduces emissions by an estimated 962,133 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (TCO₂) each year, which is over 3 times greater than any waste management project slated to receive carbon credits.
- Greater value of waste – Wastepickers add value to discarded materials. For example, a single unit of plastic rises in value by 750% prior to being sold as a new recycled product in the market.
- Overflowing landfills are never a pretty sight – Wastepickers reduce pressure on the landfills and save the municipality money in collection, segregation, transportation and recycling of wastes. For example, in Delhi itself, municipalities have saved around Rs. 15 crores annually from the services of wastepickers!
- Larger the number, more the recycling – The UN Habitat's State of the World's Waste, 2010 report stated that on an average, across the world the informal sector is able to recycle 15% of the waste. Statistics show that while the formal sector in Bengaluru recovers 10% of materials from waste, informal sector recovers 15% materials. Similarly, while Delhi's formal sector recovers only 7% materials from waste, informal sector recovers 27%. Whereas internationally speaking, Bamako in West Africa recovers a whopping 85% of materials from waste by its informal sector only.

Chintan's DTDC service in the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) area has been operating since 2004, collecting waste from around 30,000 households daily and benefitting over 500,000 citizens every day.

Mysuru is divided into 65 wards where the Mysuru City Corporation (MCC) runs 9 zero waste management (ZWM) units. Here bio-degradable waste undergoes composting and dry waste is segregated. DTDC services of 62 wards are outsourced to 620 labourers, while remaining 3 wards are handled by 30 workers of Mysore City Wards Parliament.

Philippines has the Payatas Alliance for Recycling Exchange (PARE) consisting of 15 associations whose members are dumpsite pickers. About 2,000 informal members of PARE called 'baraot', sell their recyclables directly to junkshops. Specialized waste collectors of food wastes, textiles and other specific materials are also active. In all, they recover 10,257 tonnes of recyclables and 1,241 tonnes of food waste annually!



Satto, member of Safai Sena

Satto, a wastepicker working with Chintan and Safai Sena says: "It is only due to wastepicker's voluntarily taking upon themselves various health risks, that the cleanliness of the environment and health of public is ensured. Therefore society must recognize the crucial service that wastepickers offer and employ them."

What should the municipalities do?

- They must provide ID cards and uniforms to the wastepickers.
- Municipalities should not tender to one contractor, the entire waste handling from DTDC to transportation and dumping. DTDC by wastepickers should be mandated allowing wastepickers to keep the waste. For example, SWaCH is authorized by the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) to provide DTDC to over 4,00,000 households across 76 prabhags in 15 municipal administrative wards of the PMC. For this, the PMC pays SWaCH fees for its management and provides equipment and office space.
- Space of approximately 4000 ft² for solid waste handling must be allocated near landfills for segregation and sorting of waste by wastepickers. In Delhi, Chintan along with Safai Sena has mobilized over 12,000 wastepickers and trained them to deliver professional waste management services at grass-root level. Around 5000 trained wastepickers who are provided uniforms and ID cards by Chintan handle over 21 tonnes of waste daily which is brought to Chintan's MRFs where it is segregated into different varieties, value added and sold to authorized recyclers.
- Personal protection equipment should be provided to wastepickers to ensure they do not have to sift through hazardous waste with their bare hands.
- Basic infrastructure like land, capital goods like expensive machinery and assets such as space alongwith vehicles to transport waste must be provided to wastepickers. Easy renting and leasing schemes should be made available to them.
- Documentation, both baseline and inclusive, of informal sector should be extensively done by the ULBs with the help of organizations working with wastepickers to gain access to grass-root data and reduce costs.

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Naresh Kumar, Chairman, NDMC

Naresh Kumar, Chairman NDMC: "All those stakeholders who are involved directly or indirectly into waste management have to be taken into account into the entire cycle of waste management. The wastepickers and people who are similarly placed are also very important component in waste management. Unless we involve them, it will be very difficult to have a very efficient waste management system."

Quite evidently, informal waste recycling sector is indeed the real game-changer for any country's waste story. It is time we realize the worth of the informal sector in every state and nation, encouraging the filling of perceived gaps to ensure inclusion and safeguard the basic human dignity of the informal sector.