



Integrating Waste Pickers into Municipal Solid Waste Management in Pune, India

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No person should have to be immersed in solid waste for their livelihood, yet every day hundreds of thousands of informal waste pickers in India and across the developing world scrounge through rubbish heaps in the streets, dumping grounds and landfills to recover recyclables in order to earn a living. Their continuing presence reminds us of the socio-economic inequalities that must be addressed and corrected by governments, as well as common residents. In 1978, Birkbeck remarked that the Cali landfill in Columbia was like an informal factory. He observed that waste pickers had “organised themselves to defend their right to work, but for a number of reasons are unlikely to press for improvements in their working conditions” (Birkbeck 1978: 1173). Even those who recognize the value of the recycling work carried out by waste pickers are often sceptical that this activity has the potential to become “decent work.”

Waste pickers in Pune, India, however, have scripted their exit out of the rubbish heaps and landfills to transform their lives. They did so by defining a legitimate work space for themselves in municipal solid waste manage-

ment, in ways that improved their working conditions. Key to this was the unionization of informal self-employed waste pickers into the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat in 1993. Thereafter, KKPKP spearheaded the battle of waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers and waste collectors to be recognized as workers.

Their arguments were simple. Waste pickers recovered materials for recycling, reduced municipal solid waste handling costs, generated employment downstream and contributed to public health and the environment. The establishment in 2007 of a wholly worker-owned cooperative of waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers, waste collectors and other urban poor has been an important milestone in KKPKP’s work. The cooperative is aptly christened SWaCH, an acronym for Solid Waste Collection Handling that also means *clean*, in the local language. Conceived as an autonomous social enterprise, SWaCH Seva Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit, as it is formally known, provides front-end waste management services to Pune City, with support from the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC). This Brief outlines how this



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partnership developed and operates in Pune, and complements the documentation of cases of waste pickers who have been integrated into municipal waste management systems elsewhere.

Box 1: Pune at a Glance

- Pune City is part of the Pune Urban Agglomeration (UA) with a population of 5.05 million.*
- Pune City, occupying 243 sq. km., is the jurisdiction of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), which was established in 1959.
- Pune City has a population of 3.11 million*
- The average literacy rate is 95% for men and 87% for women.*
- Per capita income is Rs. 1,11,637 (US\$1,993) per annum.**
- Per capita waste generation is 364 gm across economic classes.***
- The estimated daily waste generation in Pune is 1.400 metric tonnes.****

Sources:

- * Census of India 2011
- ** Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2010-11
- *** Report on Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Solid Waste Management and Drainage for IAF Airfield Town of Pune http://www.cpcb.nic.in/pcpdiv_plan4.htm
- **** Assessment of Status of Municipal Solid Waste Management in Metro Cities and State Capitals. MPCB and NEERI, as referenced from http://www.cpcb.nic.in/pcpdiv_plan4.htm

Introduction to Pune

Historically considered a sleepy pensioners' town, Pune and its environs have seen unprecedented industrial and economic growth as well as a migration-led population increase during the last decade. Pune is the ninth largest city in India, and its main drivers of economic growth are information technology (IT), biotechnology (BT), manufacturing industries and education. Pune UA has 38 IT parks, 38 functioning cooperative industrial estates, and 3,000 cooperative industrial units in operation; 70,000 micro-small and medium enterprises and 700 large enterprises. The unorganized manufacturing sector employs 418,000 workers. Pune also has six universities and 600 colleges (Economic Survey of Maharashtra 2010 -11).

Recycling Markets in Pune

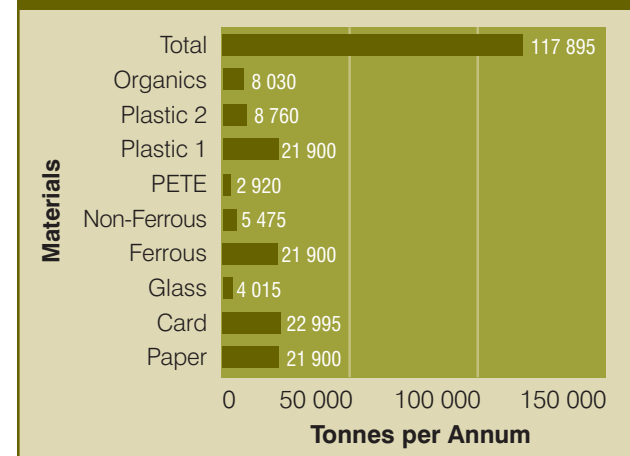
Pune boasts robust recyclable materials markets where materials trading and processing operations are carried out. The markets consist of sub-markets that operate at different levels of trading activity. The lowest end is the retail segment, in which waste pickers – who constitute the base of the pyramidal market structure – and itinerant waste buyers are the sellers. The sub-market at the middle level comprises buyers and sellers among the traders. Transactions are complex in this sub-market, with buyers and sellers changing places for different commodities. Towards the apex of the pyramid, there is progressive commodity specialization. Recyclable materials transit to manufacturing industries through the higher levels of trade enterprises. Informal recovery and trading in recyclable materials is entirely market driven and flourishes without any subsidies. Waste pickers and itinerant waste buyers comprise 76 per cent of the workers in the recycling market (Chikarmane et al. 2001: 148). In numerical terms there are about 8,000 registered waste pickers and itinerant waste buyers (KKPKP 2012) and about 556 traders (PMC 2012) in Pune.

Organization of Waste Workers

Waste pickers and itinerant waste buyers were organized into KKPKP after a resolution was passed at the first Convention of 800 such workers in 1993. Delegate after delegate asserted her right to work with dignity, and without harassment. Thousands of waste pickers walked the streets proclaiming “*Kachra amchya malkicha... nahi kunachya bapacha*” (we own the waste, it does not belong to anyone's father!) and staking claim to the recyclables that they collected. KKPKP argued that collection of recyclable materials constituted work and sought recognition for the workers from the PMC. A series of collective actions that protested against abuse and discrimination of aggrieved waste pickers followed.

Waste management is essentially materials management. Municipalities derive immense benefits from the informal waste sector by way of waste diversion from the municipal

Graph 1: Informal Sector Materials Recovery in Pune (2006)



Source: Scheinberg et al 2010:15.

system as also the landfill, at no cost. But waste pickers are not municipal employees. They are self-employed workers. They recover materials. The labour that they put into retrieving, collecting, sorting, dismantling, breaking down, and sometimes washing, converts the collected materials into commodities that can be sold as raw material to manufacturing industries. Thus waste pickers are an integral part of the materials supply chain to industry. Effectively this means that they contribute to national productivity and income. As workers go, waste pickers and itinerant waste buyers are not always among the economically poorest, but they are usually among the most socially excluded and discriminated against populations in urban areas. Pune was among the first municipalities in the country to authorize waste pickers and itinerant waste buyers to collect recyclables by endorsing their photo-identity cards.

Conditions of Work and Contribution to the City

Over the next decade KKP, along with academic institutes and other agencies, set about documenting the conditions of work for waste pickers and quantifying their contribution to solid waste management and to the environment. Box 2 contains summary profiles of collectors and their conditions of work.

This research found that each waste picker in Pune contributed US\$5 worth of free labour to the municipality every month, and their combined labour saved the municipality US\$316,455 in municipal waste transport costs (Chikarmane et al 2001:101.). Collectively waste pickers earned US\$2.25 million annually. As is clear from Graph 1, it is estimated that in Pune alone nearly 118,000 tonnes of material was recovered by the informal sector annually, diverting 22 per cent of the recyclables away from landfills in 2006. In money terms



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the net environmental benefit accruing from the informal sector is calculated as € 2.830.333 (US\$3,615,900) for the same year. (Scheinberg et al. 2010.:15).

This documentation made it possible to conduct evidence-based advocacy and secure gains for waste pickers. Medical insurance paid for through the municipal budget was one such gain (2002); support for the SWaCH Cooperative was another (2006); and space in the city for SWaCH+ value-added services and activities was yet another (2012).

The Legal and Policy Framework for Integration of Waste Pickers

The Bombay Provincial Municipal Corporations (BPMC) Act of 1949 is the overarching law under which the PMC is constituted. All municipalities in India operate within variants of this law. Municipal Commissioners are responsible for cleansing of streets and removal of refuse, in areas designated as municipal corporations. Municipalities are tasked with providing receptacles in public areas into which residents deposit refuse; and with collection, transport and disposal of refuse in a manner that is not detrimental to public health. It is the responsibility of the owner or occupier of premises to have the refuse

Box 2: Statistics

Personal and Socio-Economic Profile of Collectors

- 90% of waste pickers are women
- 50% are under 35 years of age
- 25% are widowed or deserted
- 30% are in women-headed households
- 90% of the women are illiterate
- 8% are sole earners
- 45% contribute to more than 50% of household income
- almost all waste pickers are from the erstwhile “untouchable castes” also referred to as scheduled castes
- 50% started their work life in this sector
- most waste pickers source domestic waste
- most see no alternative outside this occupation

Conditions of Work

- 75% walk for more than five hours
- 50% work 9-12 hours daily
- all manually handle garbage
- 30% have been bitten by dogs
- common problems include:
 - harassment
 - insecure earnings
 - no legal protection
 - no social security
 - unfair practices by traders
 - vulnerability to skin, gastro-intestinal and musculo-skeletal ailments

collected and deposited in a receptacle or temporary deposit place in accordance with written notices issued by the municipal commissioner, pending final disposal. However, door to door collection of waste (primary collection) is not mandated by the BPMC Act. Importantly this Act allows for the engagement of any agency for carrying out municipal work.

Since its inception, KKPMP has also made strategic representations to various committees and commissions constituted by the Government or the Courts. In many cases these committees incorporated the recommendations made by KKPMP, which eventually led to an enabling policy environment in which the initiative aimed at integration, SWaCH, could be incubated and institutionalized. Box 3 provides a summary of the legal and policy environment.

Solid Waste Management in Pune City prior to KKPMP's Interventions

Five years after they came into effect, the PMC was not compliant with the Municipal Solid Waste Handling Rules. It was unable to meet the December 2003 deadline set by the court for implementation of the rules.² The PMC did not have a solid waste management (SWM) department. Neither did it have a plan. Using its own vehicles and labour, PMC could service only 7 per cent of households for door to door waste collection; 86 per cent of the municipal solid waste was collected from community bins placed in public areas. Fleet utilization was poor and just 42 per cent of the municipal community bins were emptied daily (All India Institute of Local Self Government 2005). Municipal op-

erations were carried out by municipal employees. Typically garbage entered the municipal system in mixed form. No material recovery took place within the formal municipal system. In the municipal lexicon, solid waste management was understood as collection, transport and disposal. Residents successfully petitioned the courts to effect closure of the Paud dumping ground in 2001. Subsequently, unprocessed waste was dumped at a single landfill at Uruli village. Beleaguered villagers sought relief from the courts (Gram Panchayat Uruli Devachi vs. PMC).³ PMC spent Rs.1400 (US\$29.40⁴) per tonne and the revenue, by way of conservancy tax, was one tenth of the total expenditure incurred.

A parallel informal sector comprising waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers and traders operated, recovering some of the recyclables generated by households, shops, offices and other establishments. The high value items were purchased for reuse, repair, dismantling or sale by itinerant waste buyers. They sourced small capital and carts from their traders. Waste pickers engaged in free recovery recyclables from the streets and landfills. Thus, all the waste generated did not make its way to the landfill. However, this back breaking, demeaning work was often carried out in the company of dogs, cats, cows and buffaloes and sometimes even rats and bandicoots. The informal system, although complementary and integral to the formal system, was not recognized as such.

For decades after independence, garbage in Pune was out of sight and mind, other than when it lay uncollected on the streets. After collection it was banished to landfills and dumped on unsuspecting villagers, who had little voice and no choice in what landed in their backyards. What remained on the streets caused grief to residents, politicians and bureaucrats alike. Each shrugged their respective shoulders and pointed

Source: Chikarmane et al. 2001: 15-51; 90-99

² The relevant court decision was Almitra Patel and Another vs. Union of India, Civil Writ Petition 884/1996.

³ The relevant court case was Gram Panchayat Uruli Devachi vs Pune Municipal Corporation Writ Petition/2746/2000.

⁴ Based on a conversion rate of 1 rupee = US\$.021 on June 30, 2001.

to the other. Some of this started changing during the early 1990s. Waste pickers organized; environmental concerns caught popular imagination post the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio Summit) in 1992; public spirited residents moved court; villagers petitioned the courts for relief for closure of landfills; the bubonic plague surfaced in Surat city in the 1990s and Mumbai was inundated in 2005. Until then, across the country, the practice was to collect, transport and dump out of sight. Then the courts prevailed upon the Government of India to act. The national government set about enacting laws and framing rules to regulate the management of solid waste. India liberalized, foreign shores beckoned, and fresh from their travels abroad, the movers and shakers in government aspired to create world class cities. Privatization of municipal services, public private partnerships and initiatives that did not require government funding became immensely popular. The Government of India stepped in with its own Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission. Bilateral and multi-lateral financial institutions such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Japanese Bank, as also private companies came in with capital-intensive techno-managerial solutions that promised to rid the city of garbage through incineration-based technologies.

Transformative Resistance

KKPKP stepped in with an alternate model that it believed was more suited to the city, informal waste workers and residents; and that was environment friendly and indigenous. The enabling conditions for integration of waste pickers were the pre-existing credible organization of informal waste workers; the legal and policy framework; inclination of the municipal administration; support of elected representatives; and the presence of a strong, formal municipal employees union that opposed privatization.

The Model Proposed by KKPKP

- direct collection of source segregated waste from domestic and small commercial generators
- maintenance of separate waste streams
- integration of existing waste pickers and informal waste collectors for materials recovery and processing
- diversion of organic waste from landfills into decentralized composting, bio-methanation and non-incineration technologies

- diversion of recyclables into recycling with the benefit of strengthening of the informal waste sector
- opportunities for up-skilling and upgrading work for workers

The model is not energy intensive and has a low carbon footprint. Only non-recyclables are sent to the landfill. It is user fee-based and reliant on the polluter pays principle. Further it provides services to slum and lower income populations.

Box 3: The Enabling Legal and Policy Framework for SWaCH

- The Report of the High Power Committee on Solid Waste Management in India constituted by the Planning Commission in 1995 calls for integration of waste pickers; formation of cooperatives for door to door collection of waste; waste segregation; ward level recovery centres; incentives for recycling units; composting and other waste treatments; disposal tax on waste creating products and user fees for waste collection.
- Report of the Expert Group on solid waste management constituted by the Hon. Supreme Court in 1998 documents the role of waste pickers and echoes many of the recommendations of the 1995 committee.
- Maharashtra Government Resolution, Department of Water Supply and Sanitation 1999 suggests photo-identity cards for waste pickers.
- The Second National Labour Commission recommends the formation of worker boards of waste pickers and provision of social security measures.
- Municipal waste (management and handling) Rules, 2000, require urban local bodies to organize for door to door collection of waste; promote waste segregation and divert waste away from landfills into processing and recycling.
- Maharashtra Government Resolution, Department of Water Supply and Sanitation 2002 addresses the allocation of work of door to door collection of waste from households, offices and establishments to cooperatives, NGOs and other organizations of waste pickers.
- Maharashtra Non-biodegradable (Garbage) Control Ordinance 2006 makes it mandatory for recyclable and non-recyclable waste to be kept separately; also provides for sorting sheds for waste pickers.
- Maharashtra Government Resolution 2006, Urban Development Department on action plan for implementation of MSW Rules, 2000 specifying 2007 as the deadline for 100% door to door collection; preference given to cooperative organization of waste picker women's groups; user fee for door to door collection.
- Government of India Urban Development Department guidelines, 2010, address integrating waste pickers; ensure rights to access and sell scrap; provide non-biodegradable waste collection centres.

KKPKP envisions a resource recovery and recycling system that includes a number of elements.

- the provision of services that are compliant with the appropriate solid waste management acts and rules and that use appropriate technology; these include door to door collection of source segregated waste; garden waste collection; e-waste collection; collection of construction and demolition waste; collection of household rejects like clothes, toys and books.
- processing units for organic wastes that are compliant with environmental regulations both composting and bio-gas plants
- the production of post-consumer, pre-recycling goods – for example woven plastic bags; beads of magazine paper; plastic substitute paper packaging and paver blocks made of construction debris
- the establishment of reprocessing units for goods like paper and plastic that are also compliant with environmental regulations
- the setting up of “Cash for Trash” centres for trade in reusable and repairable goods and recyclables.

A Space in the System

Many years before, KKPKP had identified a gap in the municipal collection system: the space between the waste generator and the municipal collection system. The union argued for the integration of waste pickers into that space of primary collection. Claims to recyclables and to this space featured in KKPKP’s list of demands and in all its representations to government. Doorstep collection would bring source segregated

waste directly into the hands of the waste picker, who would then be the service provider with the generation point (e.g. household doorstep) becoming her workplace. Maintenance of separate waste streams would also be feasible because of her familiarity with waste recovery and recycling.

In formal municipal committees on which it was represented, KKPKP advocated for a more planned approach that treated recovery and recycling as integral to solid waste management. Using evidence, Waste Matters (a consortium of NGOs), pushed for source segregation of waste; separate collection of non-domestic wastes such as market waste, hotel waste, construction and demolition waste, garden waste and e-waste; decentralized waste management; diversion of waste from landfills into bio-processing and recycling; incentivizing recycling and creation of a separate Solid Waste Management Department within the PMC. These issues were taken to the municipal administration, bureaucracy, elected representatives, civil society organizations, trade unions and the media for discussion.

Dumping the Waste Dumps

The threat of privatization of waste collection and processing was imminent. Demanding wage employment for registered waste pickers in contracted companies was one option. Contracting arrangements being what they are, secure employment and fair terms were not assured. KKPKP argued for non-financial PMC support for a user fee-based door to door waste collection pilot initiative. They received this authorization from the Municipal Commissioner, who addressed meetings of residents, municipal officials and elected representatives to promote the initiative. The waste workers, calling themselves *Swachateche Warkari* (harbingers of cleanliness), then commenced the collection.



The wholly worker-owned SWaCH cooperative, which was born in 2007 as a vehicle that would provide front end waste management services to the city of Pune and recover user fees, entered into a formal memorandum of understanding with PMC for door to door collection of waste in 2008.

SWaCH Cooperative

A little over a year later, the municipal administration was willing to institutionalize the integration of waste pickers. The proposed vehicle was a wholly worker-owned autonomous cooperative of waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers and other urban poor that would provide front end waste management services to the city of Pune and recover user fees. The proposal went through a process

of negotiation and iterations until it was approved by due process in the PMC.

The cooperative, SWaCH, was born in 2007, pursuant to sanction by the PMC General Body. PMC and SWaCH entered into a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) for door to door collection of waste in 2008. The subsequent replication of SWaCH, a motorized waste collection model in Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal limits, was formalized in 2010.

Salient Features of the PMC - SWaCH Partnership in Pune City	
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):	Signed in October 2008
Nature of arrangement:	Pro-poor public private partnership
Main tasks:	Door to door collection of source segregated domestic waste; maintenance of separate streams Collection of road sweepings, biomedical waste excluded Collection of garden waste, construction and demolition waste, e-waste on payment of user fees
Mode of collection:	Manual push carts (small motorized vehicles introduced in difficult terrain)
Workers involved:	Two workers for 200-300 households, offices, shops, other establishments
User fee:	From all classes of users
User fee amount:	Usually Rs.10 (US\$0.20) to 30 (US\$0.54) per household per month depending upon certain variables; in slums Rs.15 or US\$0.26 per household per month ⁵
Collection from slums:	To be part subsidized but this clause not implemented
Rights over recyclables:	Collectors have rights over recyclables and retain income from sale of scrap
Provision of collection equipment and safety gear:	Pune Municipal Corporation
Office, infrastructure and resource recovery centres:	Pune Municipal Corporation
Terms of payment:	Operational grant to cover management costs and some operational costs reducing annually
Worker benefits:	Provided by PMC
Complaint and customer care helpline:	Operated by SWaCH
Performance indicators:	Specified in agreement
Validity of MOU:	Five years
Monthly per household cost to municipality:	Rs. 4.38 (about US\$0.08)

⁵ All currency conversions in this table based on a rate of 1 rupee = US\$0.18 on June 30, 2012.

SWaCH Cooperative: At a Glance

Membership

Structurally, SWaCH is a workers' cooperative and powers vest with the members. All members are working members, not merely shareholders. Women constitute 78 per cent of SWaCH membership. While this holds for most age groups, the presence of men is higher in the youngest age group and among the aging. Most SWaCH members used to work as waste pickers or itinerant waste buyers. House-keeping and cleaning workers constitute another significant group. Members of the Scheduled Castes continue to be the majority in SWaCH. Other Backward Castes, as well as the middle castes, are represented in SWaCH.

Table 1 shows that worker turnover in SWaCH is not very high. Only 22 per cent have been in SWaCH for less than one year while half have been there at least since the formal MOU was established with PMC. Data pertaining to the pilot were not accessed. However, it can be concluded that the workers in 2008 had been part of the pilot. This means that they have been involved in doorstep waste collection for at least seven to eight years (membership data⁶).

Year of joining	% members
2008	49
2009	16
2010	14
2011	8
2012	14
Total	100

⁶ Source: Data Manager, SWaCH, 2012.

Governance and Management

SWaCH bylaws require three fourths of the SWaCH members and two thirds of the Governing Board members to be women. SWaCH has a Governing Board with 14 members, along with 2 representatives each of the Pune Municipal Corporation and KKKPK. There are layers of representation to facilitate worker participation in operations and decision making. There are Kothi Councils (geographical administrative units) and a Ward Council comprising member representatives who meet monthly. Policy decisions are taken by consensus, based on deliberations in the monthly Representative Council meetings.

The Chief Executive Officer heads the executive function, assisted by teams of managerial and field staff. Operational decisions are taken by executive functionaries.

The management of SWaCH have to reconcile two key objectives. The first is to provide good daily waste collection services that are compliant with waste management rules. The second is to protect and upgrade the livelihoods of SWaCH members.

SWaCH staff are not professional managers. They are “barefoot managers” whose capacities are developed through in-house training while on the job. Operations field staff are usually drawn from socio-economic backgrounds similar to those of members. In fact, a significant number are from the families of members. Others with graduate level education are drawn from a variety of backgrounds.

SWaCH Operations

Box 4: SWaCH Operations at a Glance

Scale

Operational Area	Pune City (PMC jurisdiction)
Spread	80 out of 143 kothis
Coverage	340,931 out of 703,486 households (48%)
Slum Coverage	28,716 out of 54,584 households in 126 out of 553 slum areas

Member data

Member workers	2,055
Members regularly paying 5% of earnings	1,243
Daily worker absenteeism: only 3% of total workers (Jun-Jul 2012)	

Three main reasons for absence:

- Death/accident/illness/maternity leave (self or family) – 26%
- Out of station – 22%
- Other family-related reasons – 12%

Contribution to SWM

Daily waste collected:	600 tonnes total
Recyclable:	90 tonnes diverted to recycling
Non-recyclable:	90 tonnes (includes recyclable materials for which the market is poor)

Source: SWaCH Coop, June 2012

Daily door to door waste collection from households, offices, shops and establishments is the core service of SWaCH. The organic and non-recyclable wastes are handed to the municipal transport system. The recycla-

bles are sorted in the generators' premises or in the open or in the sorting sheds where they exist. The workers then sell the recovered materials. Some members store materials in order to get better rates. The PMC and SWaCH work in tandem to ensure effective primary collection and onward transport for processing.

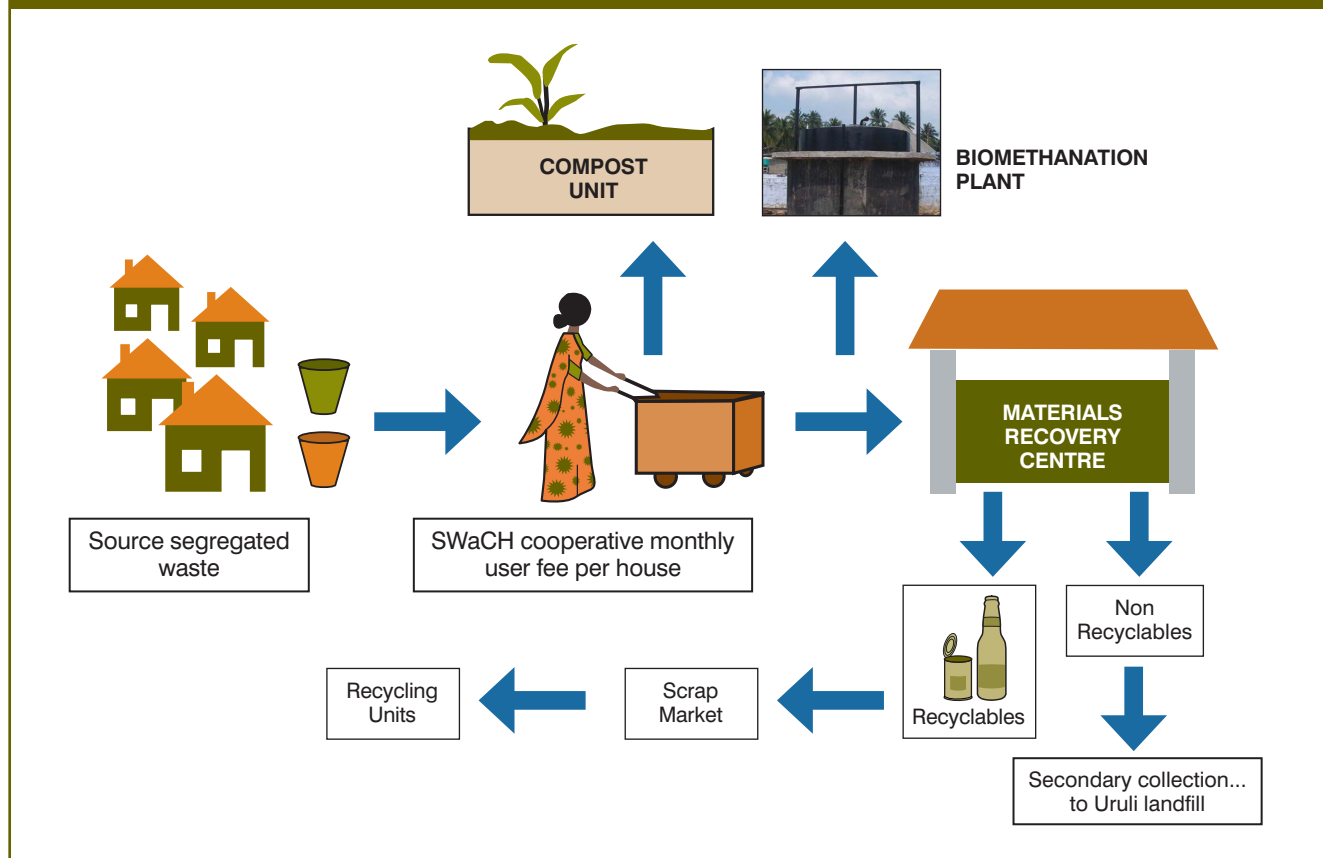
The SWaCH model relies on the satisfaction of its customer base. Engaging with service users on a regular basis is an integral part of SWaCH work. Meetings with neighbourhood civic groups have been institutionalized by the PMC and are held monthly in each municipal ward. SWaCH also carries out resident education campaigns on waste related issues. SWaCH has two helplines, one for customers and another for members who can call in with their problems. Calls to both lines are monitored. The helpline was used by 156 SWaCH customers between May and July 2012. All except two calls were low severity calls. Customer feedback is sought at regular intervals. Between April 1 and July 30, 2012, 102 SWaCH members called the helpline about various issues such as illness and school admissions for their children.

Regular communication and a commonness of purpose between the entities involved are essential for smooth functioning of the collection system. SWaCH functionaries facilitate relationships between three stakeholders: the service users, the worker-owners and the grant giving PMC, which includes the municipal administration and elected representatives. The complexities make for more directly accountable service delivery.

SWaCH+

As primary collection systems got established, SWaCH commenced other allied activities. These are referred to as SWaCH+ value added services. Some of these, such as collection of unwanted household goods and collec-

Figure 1: The Movement of Waste from Households in Pune



tion of e-waste and garden waste and housekeeping are service related. Others are related to trading in recyclables. With regard to organic waste, SWaCH members are trained to handle mechanical composters and to do manual composting. Members also work in bio-methanation plants established by the PMC on a Build Operate Transfer (BOT) basis.

Another activity still in the incubation phase is up-cycling or development of post consumer, pre-recycling products.

KKPKP-SWaCH+ are also in the process of growing Kashtachi Kamai (earnings from labour) fair trade centres based on KKPKP's experience of running one centre in Pune since 1998. Two more centres were started in Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation in 2011. Space for all the centres is provided for free by the Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad municipalities. Recyclable materials are purchased at market prices from members. Payment is immediate and in cash, and receipts are issued for every transaction. These practices are not followed in the scrap market. The approximately 100 KKPKP-SWaCH members

who sell their scrap at the Kashtachi Kamai's are entitled to profits, calculated as a percentage of daily earnings from sale of scrap. In 2012, Kashtachi Kamai distributed a profit share at 18 per cent on the annual earnings of each member. The total amount distributed was Rs.5,88,559 (US\$10,594²). Members invest at least half this amount in the Public Provident Fund or in a money-back insurance policy towards their retirement benefits. The mere presence of these Kashtachi Kamai centres regulates the recycled materials market in the localized area. That offers members greater bargaining power.

Achievements and Outcomes

Respect for Waste Pickers

Waste pickers took up the challenge to transform themselves. Just before SWaCH was conceived they bought "uniforms," – green coloured saris – to establish their intent of becoming service providers. SWaCH members are an entrepreneurial workforce, accustomed to being self accountable. Without losing their fierce autonomy, they have learned customer relations.

SWaCH represents the biggest effort at integration of waste pickers in India. The faceless waste picker causing nuisance at the municipal container has become a person who interacts with fellow residents on an equal footing. Surekha Gaikwad is a high school graduate and leads a team of eight waste pickers. She and her team have been responsible for diversification into house-keeping and composting, activities that provide employment to 120 members. She started waste picking along with her mother in law after she got married.

² Based on a conversion rate of 1 rupee = US \$0.18 at June 30, 2012. All conversions in this document use this rate unless otherwise noted.

“You look at me today,” she said, “in this nice fresh sari, and a rose in my hair, and you would not believe it is the same Surekha of five years ago. Why would anyone bother to dress up then? I spent my day at a garbage bin, and it was hot and dirty work. Even if I had a bath in the morning, by mid day I was stinking. So why bother to stay clean? But now I have to go into people’s offices to collect money, I have to look decent.”

She continued: “What is most important is the respect of other people. Today, when I go to the department to collect my money, the lady there asks me to sit on a sofa. If she is drinking tea, she will ask for another cup for me. I can walk into the canteen and sit at a table and eat, no one even looks at me, I am like one of the University employees. That is what I value the most.”⁷

SWaCH members interact with the rich and the powerful, as they do with ordinary residents. After all, even the Municipal Commissioner and the Member of Parliament generate waste that is collected by SWaCH members.

Service User Fees

To provide uninterrupted and reliable waste collection services to hundreds of thousands of households daily is no small task. Almost half the city voluntarily pays user charges because that is how the scheme works. That is a remarkable achievement in a situation where any additional taxation is resisted. Effectively, the user fee recovered by SWaCH members is the minimum amount that the municipality would have had to raise through taxes to pay for this additional service. The logic is quite simple: there is more direct accountability to the service user in this system.

⁷ Surekha Gaikwad in an interview with Mini Srinivasan, 2011.

Financial Benefits to Members

The earnings of SWaCH members are derived from user fees and the sale of recyclable materials that they recover. Groups of service users such as those living in apartment blocks are encouraged to pay user fees collectively by cheque. The working hours of collectors vary between four and six hours, including collection and sorting. SWaCH members now have access to constructed sorting spaces provided by the PMC. Quite often they store materials in the sheds as well. Most often materials are not sold on a daily basis because consolidation fetches better returns. Group sales are also common, with the trader providing the transport and sharing costs.

The income data for 1,149 members is presented in Table 2. It represents only the amount received by cheque for those members in 2012-12; the rest is received directly in cash by members.

Monthly earnings from user fees in rupees	% of Members
<500	7
501-1500	30
1501-2500	27
2501-3500	13
>3501	23

The collective annual income earned by SWaCH members from user fees in PMC area amounts to Rs.55,930,140 (US\$1,006,742). The average annual earning per capita from user fees is about Rs.30,000 (US\$540). Coupled with the income from the sale of scrap that the collectors are allowed to retain, average

annual earnings per capita are Rs.72,000 (US\$1,296). SWaCH is in the process of ensuring that data in respect of total earnings from user fees and sale of scrap are recorded and available, to the extent possible. Under-reporting of earnings is common among workers in the absence of pay slips and other documentation.

SWaCH members have relatively more stable incomes than other waste pickers in India, and work fewer hours. Most also enjoy a weekly holiday. They are now paid, whereas previously they relied only from the income from sale of recyclables. In addition, the PMC provides safety gear, raincoats, footwear, uniforms and collection equipment. Thus waste pickers now have a claim on some part of the municipal budget, whereas earlier they had none.

Challenges

Scaling Up

Not all residents are happy to pay user fees. Many of them still subscribe to the idea that they pay taxes so funding services such as waste collection should be the responsibility of the government. The number of users willing to pay a fee generally hits a plateau and from then on it becomes more difficult to convince the rest of customers to pay for the service.

Servicing of slum and low income households was to be subsidized by the PMC. However, the municipal administration has been reluctant to pay these subsidies, fearing this will lead to other dynamics. Inefficient secondary collection in areas where collection fees have not been paid has an impact on the image of SWaCH. Residents who do pay fume over overflowing community bins and feel cheated that the streets are not clean despite paying for the service.

Social Security

Social protection benefits for SWaCH workers is an area that needs further exploration. Schemes for a package consisting of life and medical insurance and death and disability benefits and old age pension will have to be prepared and financed from the municipal budget.

Waste Processing Technologies

There is an increasing tendency to look for quick fix technological solutions rather than sustainable means of dealing with waste resources. While pursuing decentralized waste management at one level, the PMC has gone ahead with a refuse-derived fuel plant and a gasification plant for processing 1,000 and 700 metric tonnes per day, respectively. The technology in both cases is incineration-based and the plants require combustible matter as feedstock. This is a direct disincentive to waste segregation. Furthermore, the companies get the high value material for free – and they aggregate and sell the recyclables from which waste pickers would otherwise have earned income. This is an area of contention, as it could be argued that waste pickers have established customary rights over recyclable resources, much like forest and fish workers have over those resources.

Conclusion

KKPKP and SWaCH exemplify that waste pickers can successfully defend their right to livelihoods – as they must – and that they can also be architects of a better future for themselves and society. SWaCH came into existence on the bedrock of the years of organizational work and credibility achieved by KKPKP, which brought



Waste pickers take to the streets with SWaCH to proclaim their right to be treated with proper human dignity. Most waste pickers are from the “untouchable” castes, and as such are subject to appalling indignities, like being shoed out of lifts which carry signs like “dogs and servants not allowed”.

to the development of the cooperative an insider’s knowledge of the realities of solid waste management.

In a recent study, Wainwright (2012) has documented the reformatory approach taken by unions to drive change by providing quality services to counter privatization in the water sector. She refers to examples of what she terms *transformative resistance*, where public sector unions took responsibility for the larger public benefit that included greater worker participation and resident participation, rather than just narrowly

framed workers’ interests. In a similar way, KKPKP led the process of countering privatization in Pune. It proposed and pushed for an alternative that incorporated larger issues and processes that were consistent with its vision of operationally, financially and environmentally sustainable waste management that required the participation of workers and other residents.

A recent unique effort initiated by SWaCH brought recyclable materials traders, the PMC and SWaCH together on a common platform to deliberate on waste man-

agement and recycling. The broad themes were issue of receipts to waste pickers; recording of quantities of materials traded and therefore diverted from landfills; annual bonuses to informal sellers; and not employing/buying from child workers. KKPKP has asked for land to be reserved for recyclable materials markets and decentralized material recovery facilities in the development plan that is prepared every two decades.

SWaCH is about transformation, transforming systems, transforming perceptions and transforming lives. It is about making a clean break with the past after having come to terms with it and embarking on a new journey. The destination is not always in sight but there are signposts along the way that reveal forward propulsion.

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