

Ragpickers resolve sanitation dilemma

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NEW DELHI: Struggling to streamline its solid waste management plan, South Delhi Municipal Corporation is now planning to emulate a method used by its Pune counterpart.

While the municipal corporations in the city have set up waste-to-energy and composting plants, waste segregation—which is critical to the success of these plants—continues to be a big challenge. Pune Municipal Corporation has evolved a model in which ragpickers collect and segregate the waste.

Various attempts by municipal corporations in the city to start door-to-door collection and segregation of waste at source have failed in the past. The erstwhile Municipal Corporation of Delhi had started door-to-door collection of waste in two zones—Rohini and Civil Lines—in 2008, but the private concessionaire involved is unable to segregate waste at source. As a result, the waste supplied to waste-to-energy and composting plants is of poor quality.

South Corporation is hopeful that this model will solve the city's waste management problem. Like PMC, the corporation is planning to integrate ragpickers in the waste management system. "We will start a pilot project in the next four-six months," Manish Gupta, commissioner, South Corporation, who had visited Pune to study the model, said. "The model can be implemented in Delhi. We will invite expression of interest for this project," he added.

In Pune, close to 2,300 ragpickers are involved in door-to-door collection of waste for which they charge a nominal amount of Re 1 per day per household. The ragpickers are a part of an organization called SWACH which is working to bring them into the social mainstream. PMC has passed a [resolution](#) under which it is mandatory for residents to segregate waste.

"There is a penalty in case waste not segregated at source. The segregated waste is then collected by ragpickers and transported to plants. Waste pickers thus earn their livelihoods and the civic agency gets segregated waste which is effectively utilized," said Kiran Jadhav, a member of SWACH who claims that ragpickers earn close to Rs 7-8 crore annually and the corporation saves close to Rs 12 crore on transportation of waste.

PMC has also started a pilot project to remove big dustbins or dhalaos from the city. "The waste is collected daily, so there is no need for big [garbage](#) bins. At present, the project is on in 20 of the 76 wards. Close to 60-85% of the waste generated in the area is segregated," Kiran Kulkarni, director, Janwani, Maharashtra [Chamber of Commerce](#), Industries and Agriculture, said. The organization is helping SWACH and PMC implement the project.

In Pune, it is mandatory for residential societies, which have come up after 2000, to have a composting plant to process wet waste. With Delhi facing serious waste management issues, municipal officials say the Pune model can be implemented at least in planned areas like Vasant Kunj, Dwarka and Greater Kailash. "There are approximately 15,000-20,000 rag pickers in south Delhi. We should look for ways to effectively utilize this resource. This will help them earn their livelihood and bring down cases of drug abuse," Dr Rajesh Kumar, executive director of Society of Promotion of Youth and Masses, said.

