

MGP: I.7.4 INNOVATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL HYGIENE: Accreditation and training of rag pickers

Background

Waste management has many partners in its value chain. The rag pickers are the basic in the chain. Rag picking is an informal income - generating activity undertaken by the poorest stratum of society. There are more than ten thousand rag pickers in Kerala. Rag picking, though, considered a menial job has become the livelihood of thousands of poor. It is estimated that these waste pickers collect about 10% of the total waste produced and pass it on to recycling industries through various intermediaries. The waste purchasers buy this recyclable material from them at a very low price. A large network exists in the informal sector in the reuse and recycling of wastes. They include migrants from neighbouring states, children, women and intermediaries.

Waste picking is a hazardous job posing severe health problems but fetching meagre income. Upgrading rag pickers to the level of doorstep waste collectors would mean that they would be relieved of the dirty work of picking up soiled and contaminated waste and that they would be integrated with the mainstream of the society by providing them access to houses, shops and establishments to collect recyclable waste in the same informal manner. It is not the intention to give them any formal employment.

A system could be introduced wherein rag pickers collect recyclable waste materials from houses, institutions, shops and establishments. This can be successful only as part of an integrated waste management system in which segregation and storage of waste at source is introduced

Any effort in mainstreaming rag pickers will work against the interests of the people involved in the purchase of recyclable waste and may meet with resistance from them. However examples from Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Bangalore etc show that rag pickers can be successfully organised and can get better quality waste from door steps which would fetch them better income.

Objective

To upgrade rag pickers to the level of doorstep waste collectors of an integrated solid waste management system by giving them proper training and accreditation.

Methodology

1. A quick study on the materials collected and sold by rag pickers, their livelihood pattern etc **(June, 03)**
2. Formulation of strategy and action plan for accreditation – through a consultative process **(July, 03)**
3. Identifying an NGO for support services **(May, 03)**
4. Sensitising local governments, resident associations etc **(August, 03)**
5. Training rag pickers, giving them uniform and badges in a way as to upgrade them as waste management assistants (WMA's) and linking them with resident associations **(November, 03)**

Outputs

- Value chain in waste management identified
- All stake holders sensitized
- All WMA's or their organizations are accredited
- Trained and duly accredited WMA's with uniforms and badges linked with Resident Associations, shops and establishments
- WMA's are recognized and accepted by all stake holders
- Better and hygienic work environment and income for the WMA's
- Improved waste management

Risks

- Since many rag pickers are migrants, organising them could be difficult.
- Rag pickers are considered as thieves by many and acceptance will be difficult
- Difficulty in finding good NGO for handholding