

## **SWACHH: Alliance of Wastepickers in India**

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SWACHH: Alliance of Wastepickers in India is a group of organizations working with wastepickers in different regions of the country. Wastepickers are a sizeable proportion among the poorest workers in the urban informal economy. They earn their livelihood from the collection, segregation and sale of scrap for recycling. Entry into the sector is largely mediated by caste and gender. Many of them are sole income earners in their families.

Wastepickers work in appalling conditions in garbage bins on the streets and at landfill sites where garbage is dumped. Studies have effectively documented that they work for more than 10 hours and walk between 10-12 kms daily carrying heavy loads of up to 40 kg. They manually handle putrefying garbage suffering injuries from metal and glass shards and are frequently bitten by dogs and vermin during the course of their work. Harassed by police and municipal workers, shunned by society, exploited by scrap traders and money-lenders, they are often excluded even in the organizing efforts of NGOs and Trade Unions.

Wastepickers are considered to be self-employed having no legally tenable employer-employee relationship either with the municipalities or the recycling industries to which they contribute. Being unprotected manual workers they are not recognized and do not enjoy any form of social security or legislative protection. As occupational communities they are economically marginalised, socially excluded and politically voiceless and disempowered.

It has been established that wastepickers play a significant though informal role in the management of urban solid waste by contributing to

1. resource recovery
2. environment conservation
3. reduction in Municipal Costs
4. the reprocessing Industry.

The legal framework for Solid Waste Management is provided by various Municipal Acts. Secondary collection i.e. collection from street containers is the most common practice. The new policy framework of the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules 2000 requires that the municipalities extend themselves into the primary collection of garbage (door to door collection). Waste segregation, which is mandatory under the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules 2000, is largely being undertaken by wastepickers. They must therefore be strengthened, acknowledged and encouraged in multiple ways.

Certain Urban Local Bodies have positively recognized the contribution of wastepickers in the following ways.

1. Identity cards have been issued to wastepickers.
2. Medical Insurance Cover has been provided to them
3. SJSRY Coverage has been extended to them.
4. Integration of wastepickers in door to door collection as service providers.

The following documents that endorse the above are enclosed.

1. Report of the II National Labour Commission (relevant extracts Annexure I)
2. Report of the Expert Committee appointed by the Hon. Supreme Court Committee on Solid Waste Management in Class I Cities of India
3. Study of Scrap Collectors, Scrap Traders and Recycling Enterprise in Pune (published by the International Labour Organisation 2001) (Annexure II)
4. Urban Poverty Eradication Cell SJSRY (Annual report Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai) (Annexure III)
5. Draft National Environment Policy 2004 (Annexure IV)

However as the rules do not make a special mention of wastepickers, Municipalities in their haste to comply with the Municipal Solid Waste Management and Handling Rules 2000, also adopt methods of waste collection that displace and further marginalise wastepickers. In Nashik, Maharashtra, 1000 wastepickers have been displaced and rendered destitute on account of privatisation of house to house collection through the contractor mode. In Surat, Gujarat, almost 2000 wastepickers are suffering the same fate. The situation is the same in Jaipur, Nerul, Virar, Nagpur, Pimpri Chinchwad and Ahmedabad.

We demand that:

**I. wastepickers in every city/town should be integrated into any system of door- to-door collection the Urban Local Body may adopt.**

- a. Wastepickers should be enumerated, registered and provided Identity Cards by the Urban Local Bodies.
- b. The first preference for any door to door collection of garbage should be given to organizations of wastepickers.
- c. The government should take a proactive role in forming such organizations under government programmes such as SJSRY.
- d. The non organised wastepickers working in the various areas of the city should be organised and their cooperative societies should be formed with the help of NGOs. The Urban Local Body should take an initiative in registering these societies.
- e. The process of giving out door to door collection should be transparent and publicly notified in keeping with the Right to Information.
- f. The Compliance criteria under the Municipal Solid Waste Management and Handling Rules 2000 should make a special mention of the measures taken to integrate wastepickers into primary Solid Waste Collection.

**II. the following measures should be taken to enhance and expand livelihoods and employment of wastepickers**

- a. SJSRY should include waste pickers as a special category.
- b. Different schemes to expand livelihoods through means such as scrap shops, composting, reprocessing.
- c. Infrastructural support in the form of land, constructed space, electricity, water and public utilities.

**III. provision for social security measures be made in the budgets of urban local bodies and the state governments**

- a. Group life insurance
- b. Group medical insurance
- c. Asset insurance
- d. Specific mention of wastepickers as an eligible category for benefits under the Central Government aided Scheme of Pre Matric Scholarship to children of those engaged in Unclean Occupations
- e. Urban local bodies and the state labour departments should implement the provisions of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 which prohibits the engagement of children in wastepicking
- f. Urban local bodies and state governments make special provision for the education of children

**SEWA**

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