

Working in the Waste and Recycling Sector: Opportunities and Challenges for Green Jobs

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Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

- Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a Central Trade Union, organizing women workers of the informal sector. It was setup in 1972
- The main goal of SEWA is to organize women workers for full employment and self-reliance.
- SEWA has organized 12, 57,504 women workers from informal sector in nine states of India.
- The membership profile of SEWA includes self-employed women workers like street vendors, home-based workers (like agarbatti and bidi workers; ready-made garment workers), and manual labourers and service providers (like construction workers, waste pickers, hand-cart pullers, head loaders and agricultural labourers).

SEWA and Waste Pickers in the city of Ahmedabad, Gujarat

- According to World Bank, an estimated one percent of the urban population in developing countries earns a living through waste collection and/or recycling and significant number is women.
- (http://www.wiego.org/occupational_groups/waste_collectors/index.php)
- The city of Ahmedabad accounts for 40 percent of the urban poor and a significant number of them are engaged in waste picking activity.
- There are around 40,000 waste pickers in Ahmedabad out of which SEWA has organized 31505 waste pickers.
- In the city of Ahmedabad, around 2400 tons of waste is disposed daily, of which 300 to 400 tons of waste is collected by the women waste pickers. Waste collected/picked by them include: paper, plastic items, iron and steel, wood, old cloth, glass bottles.
- SEWA from the early stages has been addressing not only the issues of voice and empowerment but also those of income and employment, for the waste pickers. *This is a unique approach, adopted especially for women waste pickers, that has been developed over years, for nurturing and sustaining this vulnerable, downtrodden, poorest of poor section of the society*

Challenges being faced by waste-pickers

- Waste pickers are unprotected and unorganized
- Their incomes are low
- Their daily earnings are not constant/fixed
- Women waste pickers face various problems at work, such as being asked to produce identifications like Ration cards and Voter's Identity cards, for getting work.
- At times, sweepers do not allow them to enter societies/premises for collecting waste.
- There are health issues/hazards such as skin disease, tuberculosis, breathing problems
- As there is no specific space has been allotted for segregating the collected waste, Municipal Authorities take away the waste collected by them.
- Waste pickers are facing are problems due to the prevailing global financial crisis – on one hand it is very difficult to meet their daily basic requirement because of less quantities and at the same time the rates of waste have fallen drastically.
- The policies of government are such that it becomes very difficult for traditional waste pickers to sustain their only source of livelihood.

Waste Pickers and Climate Change

- Wastepickers play an important role in mitigating the effects of climate change.
- They contribute towards the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through their efforts at recovery and recycling of waste.
- Millions of people, around the world, earn their livelihood by reclaiming reusable and recyclable materials from waste.

Green Jobs

- **'Green Jobs'** are those jobs that contribute substantially to preserving or restoring environmental quality, and include work in agriculture, manufacturing, research and development (R&D), Administrative and service activities.
- (http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_098503.pdf)
- **Green jobs** help to protect ecosystems and biodiversity; minimize the generation of all forms of waste and pollution, and reduce energy, materials, and water consumption. (<http://www.ilo.org>)
- SEWA's efforts to improve the situation of waste pickers and strengthen their livelihoods is a significant contribution towards promoting green jobs and in the preservation of the environment. This is being done through various campaigns and approaches, which includes the formation of cooperatives of waste pickers ; and providing them skill upgradation training.

SEWA's Co-operatives for Waste Pickers

- SEWA has been organizing women workers of informal sector with the goal of full employment and self-reliance. This is being done through the strategy of struggle and development. The struggle is against many constraints and limitations imposed on them by the society and the economy.
- Development activities strengthen women's bargaining power and offer them new alternatives. Practically, the strategy is carried out through the joint action of union and by forming economic institutions of the poor. It is a long process for the poor illiterate/semiliterate to form their own economic institutions like cooperative and to stand on their own and obtain the work. It requires lot of time and intensive trainings.
- Following this strategy, SEWA on one hand started to organize the waste pickers who are the poorest of poor and most downtrodden workers in informal sector and lobbied for their rights and on the other hand, promoted cooperatives for waste pickers so that they could get a decent livelihood

Green Jobs - Through SEWA's Cooperative for Door to Door Collection of Waste

- In year 2004, the cooperative of the waste picker women (promoted by SEWA) entered into contract the Municipal body for collecting waste from 46000 households in the city of Ahmedabad. According to this contract, wet waste collected by the waste pickers would be dumped into the waste bins of Municipal Council and dry waste collected would be separated from wet waste, and would be recycled.
- In all, 366 waste pickers of that area got decent livelihood locally and each waste pickers earned around Rs 2000/- to 2500/- per month.
- This system of door to door waste collection promotes the three "R" (reduce, recycle, reuse), that is essential for preventing Global Warming and for the protection of the environment.

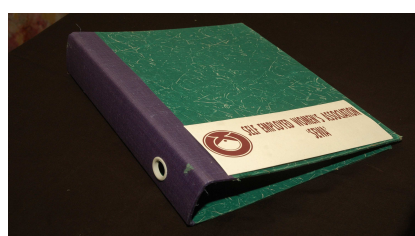
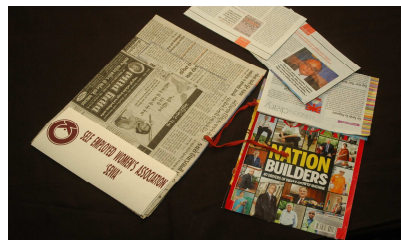
Issues and Challenges:

- Due to privatization in the work of Door to Door Collection, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has tendered out the work of door to door collection. The conditions in the tender were such that no small or medium size cooperative of traditional waste pickers could fulfill them

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The Way Forward: Improving the Lives of Waste Pickers

- Waste-pickers are thus essential in order for recycling to happen in India. They provide huge climate benefits in terms of recycling – as one of the cheapest and fastest ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They create Green Jobs.
- ***From SEWA's experience, following are the recommendation for waste pickers, during the changing era:-***
 - These waste pickers help the urban local bodies in keeping the city and environment clean; hence the roles of these poor, downtrodden, informal sector silent environments friends should be recognized and given identity cards by the urban local bodies.
 - To appoint a high powered committee to frame a policy and mandatory rules for preserving and enhancing employment of waste pickers all over India and city level by integrating them into city and solid waste management polices.
 - The work of door to door collection should be given to traditional waste pickers only by local urban bodies and not to the private companies.
 - Government resolutions be passed to the effect that 'A' 'B' 'C' and 'D' category waste from all Government offices and ULB's should be given to the traditional waste pickers cooperatives/organizations free of cost.
 - All urban developmental projects should ensure and enhance the livelihood of these traditional waste pickers.
 - Government should pass a resolution assigning the work of disposing the confidential government records by shredding to the traditional waste pickers cooperatives/organizations instead of incinerating/burning.

Thank You