



CHINTAN
Environmental Research
and Action Group

FACT SHEET

Wastepickers

Know your Waste Picker

Waste pickers are the people who actually go through the garbage bins to pick out the things we discard as waste. These wastepickers—women, children and men, are from the lowest rung in the society, are a common sight in most cities and towns around the country. Waste picking is considered the most menial of all activities and it is people who have no other alternative that are generally driven to it. They contribute a great deal to waste management as they scavenge the recyclable matter thereby saving the municipality the cost and time of collecting and transporting this to the dumps.

Some facts about wastepickers

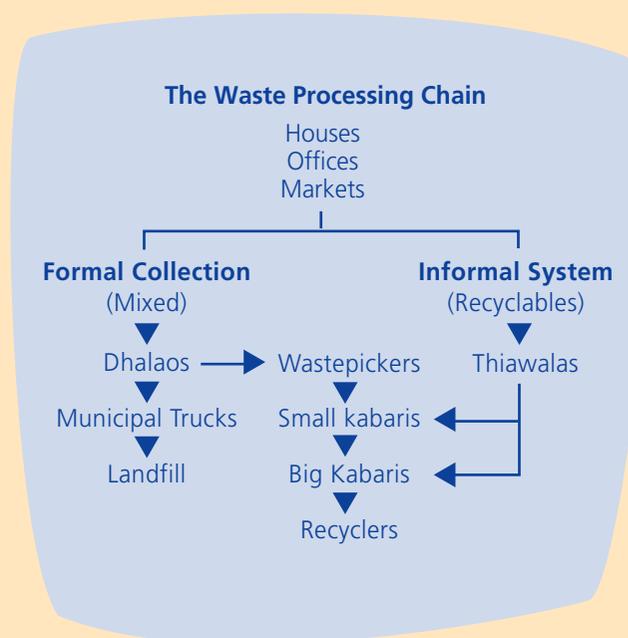
- The waste pickers and kabaris pick up recyclable waste, such as paper, plastics, metals etc. Wastepickers pick up and recycle almost 15-20 % of the garbage and are the backbone of recycling sector in Delhi.
- For every hundred people in Delhi, there is approximately one person who recycles their waste.
- In all they save the municipality at least 6 lakh rupees daily. They save municipal authorities 24% of their expenses by removing waste from the waste stream. A host of industries receives raw material collected by waste pickers, who thus contribute to saving resources
- It is the largest informal sector that is cleaning up the city and saving us from the health hazard on a daily basis.

The Biggest Informal Sector in Solid Waste Management

As we know in Delhi there are three civic agencies to manage the city's waste namely Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) and Delhi Cantonment Board (DCB).

These are the formal agencies created by the government, but there is also one informal agency doing the same work as these formal agencies. These informal sector workers are the wastepicker community. According to one estimate, they pick 15-20 % of the city's waste thereby saving up to 6-lakh rupees daily for the municipality and the government. But ironically their contribution in keeping the city clean goes unnoticed.

Almost all of the recycling is done through the informal sector, which comprises waste pickers, small buyers, a host of agents and finally the recyclers. The linkage among the workforce could be understood through the following figures:



You can notice from the figure that the waste collected by the formal agencies directly goes to the landfill. The recyclable items collected from the Dhalaoos by the waste pickers are used for recycling. The municipal agencies do not segregate the waste before taking them to the landfill. All the waste are mixed up and dumped in the landfill.



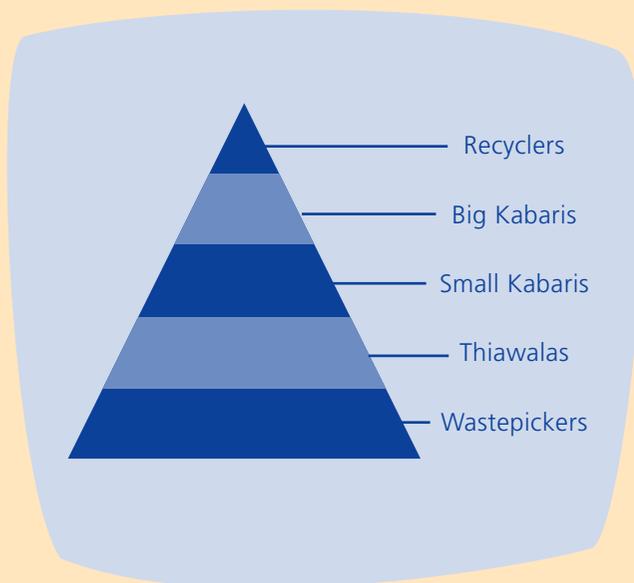
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Wastepickers (contd.)

The thousand of waste picker collecting waste is the backbone of the recycling sector.

The informal sector of recycling works like a pyramid:



The first layer comprises several hundred thousand men, women and children in urban pockets who mine garbage heaps and bins for recyclable wastes like plastic paper and metals. At the second layer comes the small middlemen, often poor themselves, who buy waste from the waste pickers.

They in turn sell the waste to the third layer, comprising large buyers who own huge godowns. Finally at the top, devouring all the labor and materials from below are the actual recyclers themselves. Most of the city interacts with the first and the second layer, whose labor actually propels recycling in India.

Health Problems

Common health problems faced by waste pickers as a result of their present working conditions are:

- Physical injuries like cuts and pricks are common among them. This is result of poor segregation at source and the non-usage of protective gloves.
- Heat during the summer months cause dizziness and nausea as decomposed waste emits a strong smell.
- Back pain due to manual work and pushing of trolleys is a problem faced by some collectors.

Assessing the health impact of the programme on waste pickers is a difficult task. A wastepickers health is affected by a variety of factors like living conditions, eating habits, personal hygiene, etc.

How can we help a Wastepicker

By Segregating our waste: We can indirectly help the wastepicker by carefully segregating the waste that is generated at our homes, thereby facilitating his search for materials that are useful to him. He will not have to scavenge in the bins for long hours.

By treating them well: Public as well as the police should treat them well, they should be treated like any other human being and their profession should be given due respect by all.

For more information, contact:

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