

JAHAN-E-KABADI

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The world of the waste recyclers

Jahan-e-Kabari is a platform for sharing ideas and news about the informal recycling sector, on issues that impact informal waste recyclers- wastepickers, pheriwallas, thia walas, kabaris. Despite the crucial services they perform in terms of segregating and recycling waste, their work remains unrecognised or poorly recognized almost everywhere globally. This newsletter will knit ideas together to share with both the sector and the larger world of practitioners and interested persons and organizations.



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Jahan-E-Kabari means the world of the waste recycler, in Urdu. Urdu is a heady mixture of several languages with Persian, Turkish, and Arabic influences. It developed in South Asia during the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire (1200-1800 AD). We've chosen an Urdu title because it's own diverse origins remind us that it's possible to create a common voice and language replete with the richness of many partnerships

Privatising Waste Services: Clearing Waste or People?

Municipalities all over the developing world are throwing up their hands and giving up on themselves. As far as waste goes, it seems as if urban local bodies and municipalities have no self confidence left at all. They've gone the privatisation route.

Flogged by the courts for non-performance, Indian municipalities have increasingly been open to privatisation of service delivery. This has received a shot in the arm as the economy globalises and new players are allowed to enter, leveraging new markets. Often, this model seems like a win-win for everyone, with the municipality saving costs and shifting to a supervision role instead of a performative role and possibly better waste collection.

In many developing countries, such privatisation carries with it a host of concerns and lost opportunities. Most of these are linked with the work of the informal recycling sector.

Waste, a nuisance trashed out of homes and offices, also creates employment opportunities for hundreds of urban poor. There are wastepickers collecting waste from houses, streets, the dhalaos, municipals bins. They segregate it, selling it to small junk dealers or kabaris, who buy the recyclables and store them in a segregated fashion. From here, the waste enters the realm of big players and finally, feeds the recycling industry, creating more livelihoods. This informal private sector works on its own momentum, unacknowledged by laws, living and working in deplorable conditions, harassed by officials and subject to

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social ostracism. Logically, it must be upgraded.

The numbers are not small either : Delhi has over 150,000 self-employed recyclers, who handle almost 20% of the waste generated reducing the burden of the municipal authorities, saving the Municipality over Rs.6 lakh (US \$ 14 thousand)¹ daily. In Mumbai, guestimates suggest there are approx 1 lakh waste recyclers.² Buenos Aires, has over 9,000 wastepickers mining recyclables from the waste.³ In short, waste collection, segregation and recycling has long been privatized before the entry of branded private players.

From Chennai to Cairo, a shift from

corporate for access to the waste. This marginalization isn't just a job-loss. It's the break up of a rich and viable network of the informal (and largely poor) sector through which many transactions of daily life take place, enabling education, foster care, security, and assistance during emergencies. All over the world there are lessons to be learnt from privatisation of waste services.

Think of Cairo, the Egyptian capital. It had a thriving informal recycling sector - with the Zabbaleen as the traditional community of collecting, segregating and recycling waste. Despite a long history of opposing privatization of waste transportation, in 2002, a multinational company was

collectors or the cartoneros. The law seeks to reduce the garbage that is landfilled or incinerated, to curb pollution. It encourages recycling and is designed to gradually bring about decent working conditions for the cartoneros. The Buenos Aires city government has sponsored the organisation of cooperatives of garbage scavengers and makes it mandatory for the garbage collecting companies to build five new recycling stations run by the cooperatives of the cartoneros.

If we are to address urban poverty and cleaner cities, we should learn from these two cases. Both teach us about the importance of including the informal recycling sector in waste management, by allowing them the rights over the recyclable waste.

India is faced with challenge of huge unemployment. Any system of managing resources and services which leads of displacement of livelihoods of hundreds and thousands people must be questioned.



¹Chintan, Space for Waste : Planning for the Informal Recycling Sector, Chintan Environment Research and Action Group, New Delhi

²AIILS, 2004 The intersection of Poverty and Solid Waste Management ,All Indian Institute of Local Self Government, Mumbai.

³Koehs, J Forgiven Admit the Waste? Health Hazards linked to informal recycling in Argentina and efforts to Eradicate child and migrant labour with waste, paper presented at CWG-WASH workshop 2006, Kolkata

one type of privatization to another, through corporate entities, has resulted in the displacement of the informal sector. A typical privatisation model includes tipping, which is picking up waste and dumping. The company is paid a tipping fee on a per tonne basis. This new form of privatization cannot be lauded for its benefits for the poor.

It seriously impacts the right over recyclable wastes, since the contract incentives transporters to collect greater amounts and expects them to make profits in multiple ways, including through sales of the recyclable waste. Everywhere, the energetic informal sector has been finding itself increasingly marginalized and at the mercy of the private

given a 15 year waste management contract in North Cairo. The Zabaleen was unemployed in a few months. After months of negotiations, the company agreed to hire them to work. But this did not give them the right over waste, and so they refused to join the company. Finally, the company, unable to find the expertise required to handle waste, decided to turn a blind eye to the waste they took away while they worked.

Some governments have taken good, pro-active steps in this sector. Argentina has passed new law on Integral Management of Solid Urban Waste, better known as the Zero Garbage Law of 2005, it gives legal recognition to the traditional waste

Read other recent articles on informal recycling sector and privatization: Sethi, A. 2006, Waste and Wealth, Frontline , Vol.23, No. 07, Apr 08-21 <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/stories/20060421002508600.htm>

Although Chintan takes the responsibility to bring out this newsletter, we can only do so with your diverse inputs.

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