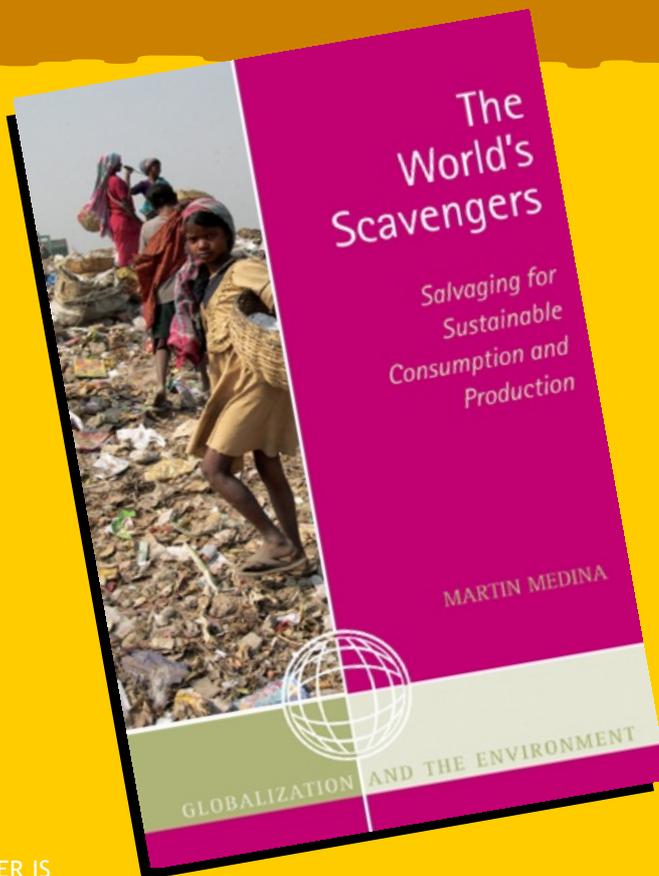


JAHAN-E-KABADI

September
2007

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

Scavengers Of The World

Jahan-e- Kabari, the title of this newsletter, refers to the world of waste recyclers. It may as well have been the name of Martin Medina's book on wastepickers, 'The World's Scavengers'. The title is self explanatory, and originates from Medina's PhD work in Mexico and the United States.

The World's Scavengers takes a good, hard look at the issue of wastepickers almost everywhere: India, Egypt, Brazil, Mexico, Columbia and the Philippines. All the research brings out a central thesis, which is likely to resonate with practitioners worldwide. It is this: wastepickers have been around for several decades, if not centuries. Handling waste is an ancient occupation and one which deserves both kudos and facilitation. In fact, as the world struggles through an urban explosion, more people than ever before will turn to this work. But, Martin constantly points out; it's not about jobs alone. The net worth of the occupation is likely to be millions of dollars and the environmental benefits huge. In other words, what his book

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proposes is a case for recognizing and protecting a valuable service with multiple positive spin-offs.

There are two aspects of this book which are particularly useful. The first is the historical backdrop of scavenging, as it were. While the example of the painter Manet depicting chiffoniers is well known, who knew about the value of scavengers work in the United States. Medina tells us that by



Martin Medina

the turn of the 20th century, Boston, Philadelphia and New York were relying quite heavily on such scavengers for waste collection. In New York, they collected 612 tons of waste each day at that time!

History also contains policy. Martin explains how exactly the city of New York reacted to this. They built four sorting plants especially for the scavengers to recover

recyclable materials, between 1890 and 1910. For the developing world activist, this information is an advocacy tool.

Other parts of the chapter show how waste comes to be: human urine and excreta was much sought after for use as fertilizer and dyes in medieval Europe. The change in science, public health, chemistry and urbanization moved these materials into the realm of waste.

The second useful aspect of this book is its tight studies of different country case studies. This allows for cross country comparisons and a bird's eye view of the sector. It elicits ideas. Could there be, for example, a link between the remarkable organization of waste under the Aztecs, the ruin of this system by colonization and its recovery through organizing wastepickers that Martin describes?

Martin's strategy is to offer such case studies and tease out broad trends, comparing them to reach conclusions. In the process, he is also able to show how, despite different political and cultural conditions, there is a converging idea of how to work with the sector globally. Through several examples, he shows there is no alternative to organizing wastepickers.

Although Medina does not elaborate on political organization, except in Columbia, we learn how organizing itself become a process of politicization, spiraling up the demand for new rights and the end of poverty in some urban pockets.

Although Chintan takes the responsibility to bring out this newsletter, we can only do so with your diverse inputs. Please write to us at Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group 238, Siddharth Enclave, New Delhi 110 0 14 or email us at: bharati@chintan-india.org

Copies also available in Hindi