

## Green collar workers from all over India to hit the streets in the capital!

The climate is warming, the climate change debates sizzle, landfills are on fire and summer is almost here! Amidst all this literal and figurative heat, India's waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers and other bottom of the pyramid waste managers and recyclers from 20 cities – Ahmedabad, Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Delhi, Mumbai, Ujjain, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Patna, Nashik, Nagpur, Bhopal, Ghaziabad, Goa, Latur and Tirupati hit the streets on March 10<sup>th</sup> 2010 with the messages--- Recycling Cools! kuda hamara aapka nahi kise ke baapka! We Recycle Resources!

Simultaneous rallies of over a thousand wastepickers will take off on 25<sup>th</sup> March at 11 am in Delhi and culminate at 1 pm at Jantar Mantar for the First National Public Meeting of wastepickers. They will symbolically wear green collars to assert that they are India's true 'Green Collar Workers'.

The intention is to call attention to the fact that different Ministries of the Government of India are speaking in discordant voices about issues such as waste to energy, urban renewal, privatisation of solid waste management, environmental regulation of recycled materials and targeted social security measures based on outdated income poverty estimations all of which have a bearing on the lives and livelihoods of millions of wastepickers and other informal recycling workers. There is serious disconnect for example between self employment and enterprise and the contracting of municipal waste services in ways that exclude wastepickers. As there is between the promotion of labour intensive micro-enterprises and the awarding of contracts to companies that displace wastepickers. Equally absurd is the attempt to espouse recycling while subsidising incineration based waste to energy plants that compete with recycling for feedstock. Wastepickers from different cities across India will speak about their experience of these changes and the havoc they have wrought on their already precarious existence.

India is home to 15 lakh scrap and waste collectors who earn their livelihoods from recovery/extraction, categorisation and sale of recyclable scrap. They also provide waste management services such as door to door waste collection, composting and biogas maintenance. A significant number of women and socially marginalised populations are engaged in these occupations. For centuries waste was something that was collected, transported and dumped somewhere out of sight. Only the poorest of the working poor saw value in it and built their livelihoods around it. While the rest of society covered its noses they said "don't waste waste".

Practically every city in India wants to metamorphose into a world class city. Who pays the bill? It's millions of enterprising informal waste workers at the core of a sustainable waste management model that should make India swell with pride. So why doesn't it? It's because Indian cities are littered and dirty and 'visually polluted'. Since when did the informal waste worker become a 'visual pollutant'? By all accounts informal waste workers actually help to reduce waste not create it! They do not buy packaged good. They collect the packaging as raw material for recycling and vegetable waste for composting. They are integral to sustainable world class cities. They *are* the 'common man' the government is sworn to protect!

Environmental concerns are now centre stage on the global agenda. Carbon credit markets have added lustre to waste management. India is the emerging market at the bottom of the pyramid for waste management businesses and technology providers. The efficient enterprising informal waste recycling sector in Europe, North America and Australia was overwhelmed by waste management companies that hawked technological solutions to waste in consumerist societies. The obliteration of the waste informal sector in those countries has had disastrous environmental consequences besides escalating the overall costs of waste management and recycling. Does India want to repeat that folly or learn from it?

The value of the waste informal sector is indubitable. That it is poised on the threshold of change is also not in doubt. The challenge lies in enabling informal waste workers to drive the change and negotiate its complexities. ○ ○

### **We demand that:**

1. Every scrap and waste collector should be registered by the Urban Local Body and provided a photo-identity card that authorises him/her to collect, retain or sell waste
2. Only registered scrap and waste collectors should be eligible for undertaking door to door waste collection
3. Every local body should as part of the land use plan/ development plan/master plan, make provision for amenity spaces in every neighbourhood for undertaking composting, biogas and categorisation of scrap
4. Micro-waste collection and processing enterprises of waste pickers should be given capital and infrastructure by the urban local body and the state governments
5. Waste to energy projects that use municipal solid waste as feedstock for burn technology should not be permitted
6. All registered waste pickers should be eligible for benefits under government schemes irrespective of BPL status

## **Alliance of Indian Wastepickers**

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