

Chapter 4: Formal Integration into Municipal Waste Management Systems

by Melanie Samson

The work of waste pickers is largely unrecognised. When not treated as invisible, waste pickers are frequently harassed by police, security, municipal officials and residents who accuse them of ‘stealing garbage’ and allege that they are responsible for crime in the area. However, waste pickers perform an essential service and save money for municipalities by reducing the amount of waste that goes to landfills. In reality, waste pickers are an integral part of the waste management systems in the cities where they work.

Waste pickers in numerous cities around the world have mobilised to demand recognition and formal integration into municipal waste management systems. This chapter looks at how waste pickers have been formally incorporated into municipal waste management systems in four municipalities. The case material presented here is drawn primarily from two extremely valuable country studies of Brazil (Dias and Alves 2008) and India (Waste Matters SNTD Women’s University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008) commissioned by the GTZ as part of a broader project investigating the role of waste picking in municipal waste management. Additional information on the Brazilian case of Diadema is drawn from Jutta Gutberlet’s insightful book *Recovering Resources Recycling Citizenship: Urban Poverty Reduction in Latin America* (Gutberlet 2008).²⁹

These four cases highlight the significantly different approaches that have been taken in each city. In Delhi, India, although door-to-door collection and segregation of waste by waste pickers is sanctioned by the New Delhi Municipal Council through memoranda of understanding with Chintan Environment Action and Research Group, payment is made directly from residents to the waste pickers. In Belo Horizonte, Brazil, the municipality has a formal accord with the Asmare association of *catadores* and provides it with a monthly subsidy. However, this subsidy is not linked directly to service delivery and comes from the social welfare budget. In Diadema, Brazil, the municipality has implemented the first programme in the country in which, in addition to being able to keep recyclable materials, a co-operative of *catadores* is remunerated by the municipality per tonne for the materials that it removes from the waste-stream via a source segregation door-to-door service. Lastly, in Pune, India, after mobilisation by the KKP KP trade union of waste pickers, the municipality has moved away from a contracting model and has made door-to-door collection the responsibility of a co-operative which receives support from the municipality but is independently controlled by its members. The co-operative receives payment directly

²⁹ Information on these municipalities was also presented at the First World Conference of Waste Pickers in March 2008 and can be found at <http://www.recicladores.net/index.php?lang=english>.

from service recipients and is accountable to them. Each of these approaches has different implications for how waste pickers relate to the state and residents, how the waste management system is transformed as a result of formal integration, and how waste pickers generate their livelihoods.

Some questions to think about when reading this chapter are:

- How are the different approaches shaped and influenced by both mobilisation by waste pickers as well as the broader legislative, social, political and economic context?
- What are the advantages, disadvantages and implications of different ways of compensating waste pickers financially for their labour (for example, access to recyclables, an organisational subsidy, payment for services by residents, payment for services by the municipality)?
- What challenges and issues arise for waste pickers when they become formal service providers remunerated for services delivered?

Delhi, India – From a Cup of Tea to Payment for Services

Historically, municipalities in India have not provided door-to-door collection and have only taken responsibility for disposing of waste that has been deposited in communal collection points, called dhalaos. However, as part of its ruling in the case of *Almitra Patel vs The Union of India*, the Supreme Court decided that door-to-door collection of segregated waste should be implemented in all municipalities by December 2003. It did not, however, prescribe how this was to be done.

In response to the ruling, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) initially began to informally sub-contract collection to people known to the existing ground level staff. This negatively affected waste pickers who had previously been providing similar services. In response, the waste pickers organised to demand that they be formally contracted to do the work.

The NGO Chintan Environment Research and Action Group had already organised 2,500 waste pickers in the NDMC areas and 12,000 in the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) areas. Chintan and the waste pickers collected data about the waste pickers' livelihoods, their contribution to waste management in the city and the savings that their work provided to the municipalities. Backed up by this research, the waste pickers mobilised to demand that they be given contracts to provide the door-to-door services. After several weeks of discussion and a series of very poorly drafted contracts, a formal agreement was signed that gave the waste pickers the right to collect waste from approximately 50,000 households.

Chintan identified several key factors that led to the workers' victory, each one reflecting the importance of the workers' active engagement in their own struggle. To begin with, the collection of reliable data made it possible to convince the municipal chairperson of the validity of the workers' case. That the municipal chairperson's opinion overrode several vested interests proves the importance of this action.

Furthermore, the waste pickers' commitment to seeing the struggle through, which notably included dealing with the loss of their income during the long process of negotiations, gave crucial weight to their demands. The workers fought fearlessly, meeting with local officials and working on the ground to transform the opinions of those who opposed their validation through contracts. Their active engagement in all levels of the process, including the drafting of their contract, illustrates the centrality of the workers themselves to their own empowerment.

The NDMC has negotiated four memoranda of understanding (MOUs) for service delivery with Chintan. The programme is monitored by a waste picker who is paid out of monthly contributions by the participating waste pickers.³⁰ In terms of the MOUs, the Council provides the waste pickers with spaces for segregation and in some cases with cycle rickshaws.

Initially, due to its interpretation of the Supreme Court's guidelines, the NDMC did not permit Chintan to charge a fee to residents for its services. The waste pickers worked around this restriction by asking residents to give them a contribution towards a cup of tea each week that amounted to a modest service fee. Eventually, in newer contracts the NDMC allowed the waste pickers to be paid for service delivery, and 70% of those being served now pay the waste pickers.

Previously the waste pickers' only income had been generated from selling recyclables, a portion of which was used to pay bribes. Now, as a study conducted in 2008 shows, their average earnings have increased from US \$59-71 per month before the contract to US\$126-126 per month. The project has led to increased cleanliness in the areas and has gained strong support from residents. It has also had profound effects for the waste pickers, dramatically improving the quality of life for them and their families. Some of the negative health risks of waste picking have been eliminated as waste pickers are able to access cleaner waste and do not have to sit in trash dumps or risk dog bites. Harassment by the police has decreased as they are now seen as legitimate service providers. As their incomes have increased, their children have stopped picking trash and are now accessing education (Waste Matters SNTD Women's University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008, 72-73).

Belo Horizonte, Brazil – A Social Accord

The Asmare association of *catadores* was formed in May 1990 in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. The *Pastoral de Rua*, or street pastoral of the Catholic Church, played an important role in promoting its formation by bringing together *catadores* in assemblies and street parties where they identified the need to form an organisation.

Initially Asmare had a difficult and conflict-ridden relationship with the municipality, although it did succeed in securing a change in the municipal constitution that advocated recycling, preferably by co-operatives. This relationship improved significantly in 1993 when the Workers' Party won a majority in the municipal council, a

³⁰ See Chapter 1 for a profile of Santraj Maurya.

position it has retained to date. The Workers' Party had an agenda of transforming the state and promoting participatory democracy. Mobilisation by Asmare therefore fell on receptive ears, and the Council began to negotiate agreements to formally incorporate *catadores* into the municipal waste management system.



Member of the Asmare Cooperative, Brazil

(photo by Sonia Dias)

The municipality's approach to recycling was developed through a consultative process that involved both Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua*. A decision was taken to implement a source segregation scheme through a partnership between the city and Asmare. In 1993 an accord was signed between the council, Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua* stating that Asmare was the city's preferred partner for source segregation programmes, and which furthermore committed the municipality to providing Asmare with a monthly subsidy to cover administrative expenses. In terms of the accord, the municipality's waste management department (SLU) must, amongst other things, provide recycling containers, a warehouse where *catadores* can sort materials, trucks for collection of materials from the containers and environmental education. For its part, Asmare must run the warehouses, sort and sell the recyclable materials and provide data on its activities to the municipality for monitoring. The city also formed a Social Mobilisation Department staffed by sociologists, psychologists, education specialists, geographers, artists, architects and engineers, tasked with helping to change public attitudes towards *catadores* and promote public participation in the source segregation

programmes. In 2000, legislation was adopted that institutionalises the Social Mobilisation Department as part of the SLU and clearly laid out its responsibilities, including requiring that it help build the capacity of *catadores*' organisations.

The source segregation programme has gone through several phases. At first, recycling containers were placed in public areas. Municipal trucks collected the recyclable materials and transported them to warehouses provided by the municipality to Asmare. At the warehouses, Asmare members would sort, bale and sell the recyclables. Individual *catadores* also continued to collect materials from businesses using manual pushcarts. They sorted the recyclables at the Asmare warehouse. Asmare members then sold the materials collectively in order to obtain a higher price, but each *catador* was remunerated individually based on what she or he had collected. The programme has now been extended to include door-to-door collection in some parts of the city covering 80,000 people.

The accord between the municipality, Asmare and the *Pastoral de Rua* was a landmark achievement in that it was the first time that a municipality in Brazil negotiated a comprehensive agreement to formally integrate *catadores* in the municipal waste management system. It has served as a model for many other organisations of *catadores* and progressive municipalities. However, in recent years some people within Asmare as well as allied NGOs have criticised the fact that the accord falls under the Municipal Secretariat for Social Assistance and is a subsidy or charity payment as opposed to a payment for services. They argue that it does not properly recognise and value the contribution of the *catadores* to the waste management system. Others point out that changing the accord to a commercial contract that would reimburse *catadores* for services provided would require significant changes in the way that they perform their work, something that the Diadama case discussed below shows has not been without its own challenges (Dias and Alves 2008, 8-9, 18-24).

Breaking Down Barriers, Changing Attitudes

As the personal stories in Chapter 1 affirm, waste pickers around the world are frequently stigmatised and confront tremendous discrimination (Beall 1997; Benjamin 2007; Chikarmane and Narayan 2005; Huysman 1994; ILO 2004; Medina 2007; Samson 2008). In Belo Horizonte, Asmare and the Council undertook a number of innovative initiatives in order to transform how *catadores* are perceived and to forge new forms of social ties between *catadores* and other residents. For a number of years Asmare and the Social Mobilisation Department ran a pre-Carnival in which *catadores* and municipal waste management employees wore costumes that they had made from recycled materials. The event showcased the talents of people previously ignored and discriminated against by society. It received national media coverage and played an important role in transforming attitudes towards *catadores*.



Carnival

(picture courtesy of Asmare)

Through the running of a bar named *Reciclo 1* and a restaurant named *Reciclo 2*, both staffed by *catadores* from Asmare, spaces have been created wherein members of the public can interact socially with *catadores*. *Catadores* who work at the *Reciclos* acquire new skills that can help them move out of waste picking if they so desire. In addition, *Reciclo 1* includes an internet café, sewing workshop and administrative centre that facilitate alternative income generating activities by Asmare members. *Reciclo 2* has a meeting space that can be rented out, and that also houses the offices of both an NGO that works closely with Asmare and the Minas Gerais State Waste and Citizenship Forum. This generates revenue for Asmare and brings it closer to allied organisations in a way that inverts traditional hierarchies between NGOs and social movements (Dias 2000, 2006; Horn 2008).

Diadema, Brazil – Payment for Services by the State

The municipality of Diadema has become a well-known and widely celebrated case in Brazil as it is the first city where *catadores* are paid by the municipality for removing recyclable materials from the waste-stream. The city's approach was not always so open to *catadores*. The first law regulating selective collection, which was adopted in 1996, did not mention *catadores* and stated that the Municipal Environment Fund (FUMMA) should receive resources generated by the sale of recyclable materials. However, in May 2000 the law was amended to prioritise the establishment of partnerships with *catadores'* organisations as well as other institutions. The amendments further stated that these organised groups, as opposed to FUMMA, should receive the funds generated from the sale of recyclables (Dias and Alves 2008, 38).

In 2002 the city launched the *Vida Limpa* (Clean Life) Program, which seeks to promote *catadores'* social inclusion, generate and/or increase their income, raise environmental awareness and promote environmental conservation. Initially the programme focused on resettling *catadores* whom the city had expelled from the Alvarenga dump. As it was aware that this would have negative effects on the *catadores'* livelihood, the municipality passed legislation that allowed it to direct resources from the city's Minimum Wage Programme and School Bursary Programme to *catadores* families. It also provided the *catadores* with a warehouse where they could continue their work. This has since been expanded and the *catadores* now have six warehouses across the city (Dias and Alves 2008, 34-35).

As in other Brazilian municipalities, in this period Diadema's *catadores* had to generate their income exclusively from the sale of recyclable materials. However, the Diadema municipality recognised that *catadores* save the city significant costs by diverting materials that would otherwise need to be transported to the landfill and buried there. In 2004 the municipality therefore adopted a law governing the System for the Sustainable Management of Solid Waste (Law #2336/04) that allows *catadores* to be paid by the municipality for services rendered. Since December 2005 the municipality has paid participating *catadores* the same amount per tonne of recyclables that they collect as it pays to private companies that transport waste to the landfill (Dias and Alves 2008, 34-36).

Under this legislation, as part of the *Vida Limpa* programme of door-to-door collection, *catadores* have received support from the municipality to form *Organizações Social de Interesse Público*, or OSCIPs, to conduct door-to-door collection and separate out recyclables. The city has also created sixty locations where residents can take their recyclables (Gutberlet 2008, 136). Although Dias and Alves (2008) and Gutberlet (2008) differ on the amounts of recyclables collected and average monthly incomes, they concur that the initiative has boosted the incomes of *catadores*. There are two reasons for this: first of all, in addition to selling recyclables, the *catadores* now also receive payments from the municipality for the service that they provide; secondly, the groups can obtain higher prices for their materials by selling directly to industry and cutting out middlemen who make a profit by paying *catadores* less than the price paid

by industry (Gutberlet 2008, 138). Dias and Alves (2008, 37) assert that the average monthly take-home pay is now significantly higher than the minimum wage.

Although highly successful, the Diadema initiative has had to confront a number of challenges. According to Dias and Alves many *catadores* who participate in the programme have found the transition from individual to group labour to be difficult. Many are used to being highly autonomous and working alone and resist collective organisation. Some dislike the rigours of being accountable for performing the service as opposed to choosing their own places and times of work. In addition, there is a general distrust of wage labour and a preference amongst some *catadores* for daily and weekly payment. As a result, some *catadores* have found it difficult to sever ties with middlemen who pay them on a more regular basis, even if this means that middlemen continue to exploit them by paying them lower amounts than if they saved up their materials and sold directly to industry (Dias and Alves 2008, 36). Gutberlet notes that participation in the programme had actually decreased from 62 *catadores* at its inception to 49 in 2007 (Gutberlet 2008, 137).

In order to promote participation by autonomous *catadores* who still work independently the municipality tried to register all *catadores*, and in doing so develop a socioeconomic profile of *catadores* in the city. The city then conducted training courses to increase awareness and understanding of the programme, emphasising that participation should lead to an increase in income. While this may help to increase participation, Dias and Alves argue that it undermines the efforts of those *catadores* who are trying to form a formal co-operative (Dias and Alves 2008, 39). In overcoming the exclusions brought about by policies such as those discussed in Chapter Five that focus on collaborating only with co-operatives, a new set of dynamics has been created. This highlights the point that policies for social inclusion of *catadores* impact on the organisation of *catadores*, and proves that there are tensions and trade-offs regardless of which approach is taken.

Pune, India – Moving Away from the Contracting Model

As in Delhi, the initiative to implement door-to-door collection in Pune came from waste pickers as opposed to the municipality. The KKPKP trade union of waste pickers started *Swachateche Varkari* ('harbingers of cleanliness') through which its members offered waste collection services to residents. The Pune Municipal Commissioner authorised the KKPKP to organise collection services and provided it with equipment and space. However, the waste pickers were responsible for the implementation of the programme. They collected the waste, retrieved and sold the recyclable materials and deposited the remaining waste in municipal containers or compost pits. The waste pickers were contracted by the residents of apartments. Rates charged depended on the area and were determined by the class of the residents. The programme started in two municipal wards in 2005. Through the combined efforts of the KKPKP, campaigners, the municipal administration and elected councillors it spread to twelve other wards and included almost 1,200 waste pickers and over 150,000 households by the end of 2006.

According to the authors of the GTZ report, this project demonstrated that people, even those living in slums, were willing to pay for collection; service providers were more accountable when paid directly by users; and collection by waste pickers led to high levels of recovery of recyclable materials and was a low-cost, labour-intensive and less polluting alternative to collection with motorised vehicles.

In 2006 the Municipal Commissioner appointed a Steering Committee that included the KKPKP and other members of Waste Matters³¹ to help oversee the restructuring of the waste management system. The Committee's recommendations included proposals to establish a co-operative of waste pickers to do door-to-door collection and to create designated sorting areas for waste pickers. In February 2007 the municipal general body approved the formation of a co-operative of waste pickers that would perform door-to-door collection and would receive support from the Council for five years. However, after elections the new municipal body rescinded the decision. Although the Municipal Commissioner was also new, he supported the initiative and asked the state government to overrule the new Council and restore the resolution to support the formation of a co-operative – it did so, but with a few important modifications. The key change related to the criteria for membership of the co-operative. While the majority of members must still be waste pickers, membership was opened to waste pickers and doorstep collectors who are unaffiliated or belong to organisations other than the KKPKP, as well as to the urban poor who have not previously worked as waste pickers but want to do collection work.

The Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH) co-operative formally came into existence in August 2007. It is governed by a committee made up of 14 waste pickers/collectors, two representatives of the Council and one representative of the KKPKP. The management team includes a Chief Executive Officer and staff responsible for Operations, Administration and Finance, Marketing, Customer Care and Relations, Management Information Systems and Data Management.

The establishment of SWaCH and the role allocated to it by a municipal resolution formally integrates waste pickers into the municipal waste management system outside of a contracting framework. In terms of this landmark decision by the Council:

- One central co-operative (SWaCH) will take responsibility for door-to-door collection of segregated waste in the entire city.
- The Pune Municipal Corporation will guide the co-operative, but it will be autonomous and independent.
- The co-operative will work in a decentralised manner with local citizen's groups and other NGOs.
- The fee of US\$0.24 per month per household is set by the Council, but is collected by the co-operative directly from individual households and businesses. In the case of slums, the Council will pay the co-operative

³¹ Waste Matters is a collective of the KKPKP, NGOs and citizens committed to a community-based, decentralised, eco-friendly, participatory, labour-sensitive and sustainable model of solid waste management in Pune.

US \$0.01 per month per household and the co-operative can charge an additional US\$0.01 per hut per month directly to the citizens in the slum.

- The co-operative will be directly accountable to the local citizen's group for providing the service.
- The waste collector has rights to the recyclable waste and retains the income earned from its sale.
- Sorting centres for the segregation of recyclable waste and non-recyclable waste will be established, preferably one in the centre of each ward.
- The Pune Municipal Corporation should provide the co-operative with funds for handcart maintenance, uniforms, gloves, insurance and other necessary requirements/services for the first five years.
- For the first five years, the Pune Municipal Corporation should provide the co-operative with training, create awareness among citizens, and pay an amount towards machinery and other unspecified items which could include things such as cleaning materials, protective gear and insurance programmes. After five years the co-operative is expected to be self-sufficient.
- If the standard of work of the proposed co-operative is not satisfactory, then the Pune Municipal Commissioner is authorised to terminate all municipal help provided to the co-operative and find an alternative service provider.

To date the initiative has been implemented in 127 wards. The co-operative has 1,510 members and services 200,000 households. The formation of the co-operative has led to an improvement in working conditions and an increase in income for the waste pickers. It has also changed the gender dynamics in the sector as men are more willing to do door-to-door collection than work as waste pickers. In a number of cases, husbands and wives work as collection teams. The authors of the GTZ report identify this as a positive move as previously many of these men did not work and instead relied on their wives' incomes. Poornima Chikarmane of the KKPKP adds that in order to ensure that the inclusion of men in this work does not result in the displacement of women (as has happened in some other cities) the SwACH bylaw requires that its membership be 75% women.³² The formation of SwACH has had material benefits for the participating waste pickers as it has improved their income, working conditions and status in the community. It has also simultaneously strengthened relations between waste pickers, residents and the state by making everyone more actively involved in service delivery (Waste Matters SNTD Women's University and Chintan Environment Research and Action Group 2008, 23-25, 59-63).

³² Personal communication with Poornima Chikarmane.