

Appeal for Support to Waste Pickers in Light of COVID 19 Outbreak

Waste pickers and other informal sector waste workers make a living collecting, sorting, recycling, and selling materials that others throw away. They contribute to local economies, public health and environmental sustainability. The vast majority of waste pickers in India are women, and *Dalits*, who have been invisible to society, faced discrimination, and worked without recognition for years. They have been perceived as thieves and scavengers, who do not have a right to sell the waste they handle, and have faced harassment at the hands of the police and citizens. Most female waste pickers are the sole breadwinners of their families – working in physically difficult conditions, travelling long distances and handling waste without adequate protection. For years, this invisible community has provided a public service – solid waste management – that benefits the entire city and saves municipalities, crores or rupees. It is only recently that they have begun to get the dignity and recognition they deserve, and have started to be integrated into formal waste management.

Pune is at the forefront of waste picker integration. In 1993, a trade union of waste pickers called **Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat** was formed, to bring together waste pickers, itinerant buyers and other allied informal waste workers. Over the years, the union has argued for the workers' the right to waste, dignity of work and for recognition of their contribution to the city. The efforts of the union over the years, has led to the formation of **SWaCH**, and the integration of waste pickers in Pune's municipal solid waste management system. SWaCH is the first wholly owned waste picker cooperative, with a current membership of 3,540 members. Since, 2008, SWaCH has a memorandum of understanding with the Pune Municipal Corporation to provide door to door collection of waste in the city, on user fee recovery basis. SWaCH currently covers more than 8,00,000 households for door to door collection and provides allied activities like composting for housing societies. Some of the KKPKP waste pickers have also been integrated in the PCMC's centralized solid waste management system as formal, contractual workers. To support these activities, the **Kashtakari Panchayat Trust** was registered in 2010. The trust functions as a bridge between organizations and, providing direct and indirect financial support, technical support and advocacy for waste picker organizations.

Current Situation

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, and the accompanying insecurity it has brought, informal workers, their work and their living conditions have become even more insecure and precarious. Especially vulnerable among them are waste pickers, particularly those who have advocated for their integration in semi- formal and formal Solid Waste Management, systems and models. 3,540 SWaCH waste pickers in Pune, and 580 KKPKP waste pickers in PCMC, provide an *essential service* of solid waste collection, and do not have the option of working from home like the middle and upper middle income groups, or suspending work like other informal workers. These waste pickers, collect, transport and sort waste on a daily basis, exposing themselves to waste material from over 10,00,000 households or more than 40,00,000 individuals. This puts them at a very high risk of infection.

The rest of the 3000 informal and itinerant KKPKP waste pickers rely solely on the daily sale of recyclables for their income. Their work benefits the health of the city and supports the city's solid waste management, yet they are unprotected due to the informal nature of their work. Many

of them simply cannot afford to suspend their work to protect their health. Totally, there are around 7,000 waste pickers working in Pune and PCMC every day, providing an essential service and keeping the cities clean.

We have advised the elderly waste pickers (close to 1000 in number) to stay home and stop working, but this cuts off their income, and makes them a critical group in need of support. Further, most waste pickers live and work in crowded public spaces, often without adequate facilities to protect from infection. Family members of waste pickers, who are often daily wage or informal sector workers, are unable to find work during the lockdown. With PCMC and Pune being two of the hardest hit cities in the nation, it is vital to support the waste pickers and their families, as they continue to work to keep our cities clean and safe.

Priority Requirements: PPE and Ration Kits

The waste pickers can be supported by providing them the necessary Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to keep them safe as they continue to work. Ration kits can be provided to waste pickers and their families as many of them may lose out on income or find it difficult to access rations during this time.

Personal Protection Equipment in the form of soaps, gloves and masks that are vital to protect waste pickers from infection. Providing adequate PPE keeps the essential services uninterrupted, and also protects waste from contracting and transmitting the virus. The PPE are being distributed to the 5,000 active waste workers in our organisations. The details of each PPE kit are in the budget below.

Of our 7,000 waste pickers, 1000 are elderly and have been urged to stay at home, making them a critical group in need of support. Providing *Ration Kits* to these waste pickers is of utmost urgency and importance. Many of their family members have also lost their sources of income and cannot find work due to the lock down. To support this vulnerable group, we have designed ration kits which can support a household for a period of one month. Each kit costs approximately Rs. 2,000 and a total of 1,000 kits per month would help us provide immediate assistance to the most vulnerable section of waste pickers. Details of the kit are in the table below. Given the current situation, there is also a need to support all waste picker families with a ration kit that costs approximately Rs.1000 per family. Although it is only the 6th day of the lockdown in Pune, many waste pickers came in to the credit cooperative today for loans for daily consumption ranging from Rs.1000- Rs.3000. We are also seeing a number of calls on the helpline today especially from itinerant waste collectors saying that the family has run out of rations and there is no money to buy any more.

Apart from procurement and distribution of the PPE and ration kits, we will continue advocacy with the PMC and PCMC and the state government to provide rations for vulnerable groups. We will support our members to access these rations, especially those without documentation, provide help with paperwork and logistics.

Since SWaCH provides waste collection services to the city, it is exempted under the current lockdown and 3500 people are going to work every day. We have letters from the Municipal Commissioner and Police Commissioner for the same. We also have a current field staff of 120

that is in touch with the workers on a daily basis. We are therefore in a position to procure the material locally ourselves.

Budget

Budget heads	Cost for 1 month	Cost for 3 months	Details
PPE	1210000	3630000	Details of kit, with prices given below
Ration Kits- 6000 waste pickers	6000000	18000000	Details of kit, with prices given below
Ration Kits for 1000 extremely vulnerable waste picker	2000000	6000000	Details of kit, with prices given below
Administrative costs	460500	1381500	Procurement, administration, data, inventorising, accounts @ 5%
Total costs	9670500	29011500	

Detailed Procurement Costs

Personal Protection Equipment

Item	Approx. unit cost	Units per waste picker per month	No. of waste pickers	Cost for 1 month	Cost for 3 months
Soaps	20	4	5000	400000	1200000
Gloves	34	3	5000	510000	1530000
Masks	20	3	5000	300000	900000
PPE Sub-total				1210000	3630000

Ration Kit for 1000 Vulnerable Families

Material	Qty per set (Ltr or Kgs)	Rate	Amount
3 kg cooking oil	3	80	240
10kg Rice	10	28	280
10kg Wheat	10	28	280
5kg jowar	5	30	150
2 kg tur dal	2	86	172
500 gm matki	1	120	120
500 gm chavli	0.5	108	54
1 kg chana dal	1	68	68
3 kg sugar	3	34	102
500 chillies	1	146	146
250 spices	1	64	64

200 gm tea leaves	1	80	80
500 gm jaggery	1	30	30
1 kg sabudana	1	88	88
1kg pohe	1	44	44
Peanuts- 500 gms	0.5	112	56
Amount for ration Per Family			1974
Transport and packaging costs			50
Total cost rounded off			2000
Cost for 1000 families			2000000
Cost for 1000 families for 3 months			6000000

Ration Kit for All 6000 Waste picker Families

Item	No. of units	Total INR
Wheat/ Rice	5	150
Jowar	5	150
Pulses	1	86
Matki	1	120
Chavli	0.5	54
Oil	1	80
Peanuts	0.5	56
Spices/chilli powder	1	100
Tea	1	80
Sugar	2	70
Transport and handling		50
	Total	996
	rounded off	1000
	For 6000 families	6000000
	For 6000 families for 3 months	18000000

About Us

Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat is a trade union, bringing together waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers, waste collectors and other informal recyclers, all self-employed workers. These workers recover, collect, categorise and sell scrap materials for recycling. They pick up what someone has discarded as having no value and give it value through their labour. They are typically treated like the trash they collect. KKPKP has successfully argued that their work is environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive, economically productive and saves municipalities crores of rupees in solid waste management. This position, after years of struggle and engagement with various stakeholders, has ensured that the waste picker members of KKPKP have a visibility, voice and validity in the city that is unique.

SWaCH Pune Seva Cooperative Society was established in 2007 as the first waste picker owned co-operative. It has stemmed from the grass-root mobilization work of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat, a registered trade union of informal waste-pickers having membership of more than 9,000. Since 2008, the PMC has contracted SWaCH to carry out door-to-door collection of waste in Pune city. The PMC covers administrative costs of the co-operative for coordinating collection service whilst waste pickers received their income from monthly user fees paid by citizens directly. Waste-pickers then segregate the recyclables from other dry waste, sort it finely and channelize it for recycling through scrap traders. The collected wet waste and non-recyclable waste is then taken by the municipality to one of their decentralized / centralized waste management plants or the landfill. This service effectively bridges the gap between households and the municipal waste disposal services.

Kashtakari Panchayat Trust was registered in 2010 primarily to support waste pickers and their families and their collectives. The support ranges from direct financial assistance to indirect support in the form of training, facilitation and research. KPT would best be described as a bridge, connecting people to each other, connecting ideas to people and people to resources to implement those ideas. It facilitates and celebrates the interaction between one section of humanity and another, to create a better world for all. The main objects of KPT include providing training and technical support to waste pickers and organizations and other informal workers, advocating for the rights of workers in the informal economy, improving livelihood opportunities for the working poor and assisting waste pickers and their organizations for sustainable waste management and recycling.



A higher level of self-reliance



<http://www.kkpkp-pune.org>

www.swachcoop.com

<http://kashtakaripanchayat.org>