

DELHI ROUNDTABLE NETWORK

18-04-2020

To,

Shri. Arvind Kejriwal,
Hon. Chief Minister, NCT of Delhi
6, Flagstaff Marg, Civil Lines, New Delhi, Delhi 110054

Subject- Emergency support to Informal Waste Pickers in Delhi to combat COVID- 19 Pandemic

Respected Sir,

We are writing to you from the Delhi Roundtable on Solid Waste Management which is a network of activists and organizations working with informal waste pickers to support and strengthen their livelihoods. As a network organisation we currently represent 35000 Waste Pickers engaged in different activities related to waste management in NCT of Delhi.

We are writing to you to bring your attention to various issues currently impacting informal waste pickers as their lives and livelihoods are put at greater risk due to the COVID-19 outbreak for two reasons-

- Unlike the formal sector, informal sector workers do not have the privilege to work from home follow norms of social/ physical distancing.
- In the present lockdown, informal waste-pickers are playing a crucial role in our fight against COVID-19 as they are at the frontline of managing our waste and are extremely vulnerable to contracting this virus.

Informal waste pickers make up nearly 1.5 - 2 lakh of the city's population and earn their livelihood through the process of picking/ collecting and sorting our waste and recyclables as well as cleaning the surroundings. Waste pickers help fight diseases and provide huge environmental and public health benefits. Although they lack formal recognition, they are instrumental in the city's waste management system.

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016 statutorily recognise the role of waste pickers in solid waste management, particularly Rule 11(c) thereof which provides that "state policies and strategies should acknowledge the primary role played by the informal sector of waste pickers, waste collectors and recycling industry in reducing waste and provide broad guidelines regarding integration of waste picker or informal waste collectors in the waste management system." This implies that waste pickers are not "outside the system" but very much an integral part of it and are statutorily recognised.

Informal waste pickers earn their income by selling dry waste and recyclables to scrap dealers but due to the ongoing crisis in the country, they are forced to leave the collected waste at the shops/ *dhalaos*. In situations where the Municipality and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) are not supporting them financially, they are not only losing their livelihood but in the absence of any other support, are spiraling into a situation of hunger and deprivation. Many of these workers are very poor, with pregnant women, old parents and small children in their families. They are the most vulnerable section of the urban poor today.

We really appreciate the initiative of your government to support small and informal workers. During the lockdown, auto-rickshaw drivers, construction workers, public transport drivers of the informal livelihoods have been provided by the Government, the necessary monetary compensation of Rs. 5000/- due to the loss of work (Please refer to Annexure 1). However, the most important work of maintaining hygiene and cleanliness in the city is being done by informal waste pickers who have not been included. It is to be noted that most waste pickers belong to the low caste and are already on the margins of existence.

Following are the key demands from the informal waste pickers: -

1. **Recognition by announcing them as essential service providers**- It cannot be denied that the informal waste pickers are at the frontline of defense against the spread of coronavirus. Just like healthcare workers, they also deserve special support and protection from the Government. Hence, the Government must formally recognize the work and contribution of waste pickers and must include them in the list of essential service providers (Please refer to Annexure 2 to see the list of essential service providers)
2. **Ensuring relief income**- The state needs to ensure the proper **minimum income of ₹5000** to informal waste pickers. For this, a list can be prepared with the help of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Unions and RWAs working with informal waste pickers. Besides this, a government circular must be issued to all RWAs making it compulsory to ensure weekly and monthly payments for waste pickers.
3. **Provision of equipment for protection**- Waste pickers must be provided with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) like protective gear for work (masks, gloves, and boots) and sanitation kits (soap and sanitiser).
4. **Provide rental security**- Waste pickers mostly live on rent and since their livelihood is under major threat, rent security for their house, as well as godown, must be ensured. For their house, the amount of ₹2000 and for godown, ₹100 per meter must be provided.
5. **Free distribution of dry ration**- Dry ration should be provided to waste picker families regardless of having ration cards and other documents such as Aadhar. For this, a list can be prepared with the help of (CSOs) Unions and (RWAs connected with informal waste pickers.
6. **Covering health insurance**- The compensation of ₹ 50 lakhs would arise only in the event of loss of life of the health worker due to COVID-19 (Please refer to Annexure 3). But we demand that the Government should announce and provide life as well as health insurance cover of ₹10 lakhs for informal waste pickers.
7. **Conducting free health checkups**- The Regular and free check-up should be arranged and set up by Government health initiatives such as the Mohalla Clinic" for screening and treatment purposes.
8. **Provision of temporary identity proof and documents**- The Delhi Government has launched an 'Application for temporary ration e-coupons' on its website where it is mandatory to have an Aadhar

card, but many waste pickers do not have that (Please refer to Annexure 4). Therefore, we demand that waste pickers without the necessary identity proof should be able to access this service, through temporary identity proof and documents. These identity cards should be considered valid until the lockdown ends and should serve as sufficient proof for access to all benefits provided by the government.

9. **Formation of statutory guidelines-** The Municipal Authority should develop guidelines for waste pickers to help prevent the spread of the disease. These should include information for awareness and guidelines regarding the urgency of segregation of waste at source.
10. **Provision of basic amenities-** Focus must also be on basic services like access to clean drinking water, toilet services, and sanitary napkins. These services should be provided free of cost, and more frequently/24x7 for waste picker communities.

Your consideration of this matter would change the outlook and condition of informal waste pickers and their families, and uplift many waste pickers from the miserable existence that they are already in.

We would really appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to seeing positive changes.

Jai Hind!

Avi Majitha: 9560337438

Anirudh Singh: 9582626589

Endorsed by undersigned:

Alliance of Indian Wastepickers

Dalit Bahujan Resource Centre

Janvikas Society

Main Bhi Dilli campaign

National Coalition for Inclusive and Sustainable Urbanisation

Azad Foundation Delhi

JANPAHAL Delhi

Harsh Gupta, IGSSS

Naseem Khan, Cequin

Neelesh Kumar, Basti Suraksha Manch

Sanchita Mitra, SEWA Bharat

Nooreen Fatima, Urban Planner

Ruchika Lall, Indian Institute for Human Settlements

Manu Mahajan, Architect and Urban Designer

Lokadhikar Organisation

Bal Vikas Dhara

Safai Sena

Basti Suraksha Manch

WIEGO

IGSSS