

Pune Waste Pickers' Innovative Efforts to Fund the Extension of Decent Work and Social Protection



By Poornima Chikarmane and Lakshmi Narayanan

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Key Points

- Underinvestment and structural exclusions in social protection have never been more evident than during the COVID-19 pandemic. A challenge is the belief that employer contributions to the financing of social protection are not possible in the informal economy.
- Taking inspiration from India's long experience with welfare boards, which provide social protection for self-employed workers and are generally financed by economic actors who benefit from their labour, informal workers' organizations in Pune are exploring innovative approaches to forging relationships with entities outside the typical frameworks of employment to gain additional financing for social protection.
- Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), a trade union of waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers and other informal recycling workers, has leveraged its contributions to the waste management system of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) to secure a number of social protection benefits from a variety of entities beyond the standard employment relationship.
- KKPKP has successfully made claims for the financing of improved working conditions, incomes and social protection benefits towards those with whom they are not in employment relationship, including the municipality, state and central governments, the urban resident, as well as economic actors in their recycling value chain.
- The principle of actors outside a direct employment relationship contributing to the financing of improved working conditions and social protection for self-employed informal waste pickers can set an important precedent in the recognition of the responsibilities of a wider set of actors ensuring decent working conditions and social protection for workers in their value chains.

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Introduction

Large numbers of people in low- and middle-income countries do not have regular employment or social protection. Only 13 per cent of those in low-income countries have social protection as compared with 84 per cent in high-income countries (ILO 2018). Workers in the informal economy, though not always poor, face a disproportionately higher risk of poverty than those in the formal economy. Underinvestment and structural exclusions in social protection have never been more evident than during the recent COVID-19 pandemic that pushed millions into poverty. This focused attention on the urgent need for universal social protection. There is a widely held belief that employer-financed or co-financed social protection is not possible in the informal economy. However, decades ago, India's welfare boards established that it is possible to provide social protection to those who do not have formal employment relationships. In recent years, informal workers' organizations have explored innovative approaches of forging relationships with entities outside the typical frameworks of "employment", to finance social protection for workers.

Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), a trade union of waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers and other informal recycling workers in the Indian city of Pune, Maharashtra state, has leveraged contributions to the waste management system of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) to secure a number of social protection benefits for its members and families. KKPKP also has enabled waste pickers to claim an annual financial "bonus" from the scrap traders to whom they sell recyclables. KKPKP – along with SWaCH, Pune's Solid Waste Collection Handling Service Cooperative of Waste Pickers – is also exploring how the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework can be used to hold producers responsible for the collection and recycling of their post-consumer products and potentially co-finance social protection for waste pickers providing these services.

Waste pickers' strategies of expanding social protection coverage respond to, and are situated in, the context of limitations of India's social protection system. These include limited ability of welfare boards to accommodate informal workers in complex working relationships, the exclusion of informal workers for poverty-targeted schemes and the often-inaccessible social insurance schemes designed with formal employment in mind.

The purpose of this case study is to document the benefits in cash and in kind that waste pickers have managed to secure from those with whom they are not in employment relationships, by challenging some of the orthodoxies in social protection. In section one of this paper, we look at the informality in Indian labour markets, poverty-linked social protection measures and the state level welfare boards for informal workers. The perspective of the membership-based organizations of waste pickers to social protection and an overview of the solid waste management and recycling chain is provided in section two. Section three details the processes that waste pickers have adopted to make claims for social protection. The welfare measures provided from waste pickers' contributions and enterprises are covered in section five. The recommendations for a worker-centric framework are outlined in section six.

Labour markets and informality in India

Workers in the Indian informal economy have always outnumbered those in the formal economy. Most informal workers are unrecognized, deprived of social and economic rights, overworked and underpaid, and engaged in low-skilled, low-paid, insecure work. The Economic Survey of India 2021-22 states that an overwhelming 476.4 million of the total 535.3 million workers in India were workers in the informal economy, and 91 per cent were unaffiliated with any organization (Ministry of Finance 2022). It further states that 90 per cent of the additional workers who joined the labor force in 2019-20 were in informal employment, and 98 per cent of them were unorganized. The survey drew upon the Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS) of 2019-20. As per the PLFS, the increase in rural labor was higher than urban, women constituted two-thirds of the additional workers who joined the labour market, and 75 per cent of the women who joined as self-employed were “unpaid family labor”. Agriculture continues to provide the most employment (232 million); trade, hotel and restaurant (75 million). Manufacturing, construction and services each accounted for about 62 million workers. Direct and indirect employment in textiles accounts for 105 million and fisheries accounts for 28 million workers. There was a decline in the share of new entrants into manufacturing and construction.

The Indian Government's 2013-14 report on Employment in Informal Sector and Conditions of Informal Employment provides information on the characteristics of enterprises and conditions of informal employment for those engaged in the AGEGC (agriculture sector excluding growing of crops, plant propagation, combined production of crops and animals without a specialized production of crops or animals) and non-agricultural sector. The report finds that over 50 per cent of the workers in the AGEGC and non-agricultural sector are employed in informal-sector proprietary enterprises and partnership enterprises, of which two-thirds employ fewer than six workers. An overwhelming majority of workers (82 per cent) in AGEGC and non-agricultural sector enterprises have no written job contracts. The proportion is 93 per cent among casual workers. As many as 66 per cent of the workers in waged or salaried jobs were working without written contracts. They had no security of employment, no paid leave, medical benefits or contributions to a pension fund. Informality was higher in rural areas, where 74 per cent of the workers were not eligible for social security as compared with 56 per cent in the urban areas (Ministry of Labour and Employment 2015).

The two years of the pandemic and the lockdowns took a heavy toll on workers in the informal economy and led to an increased demand for food grains under the National Food Security Act, employment in public works under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, and health care. The Prime Minister's Welfare Scheme for the Poor (PM-GKAY) provided additional food security for around 800 million beneficiaries in the country during the COVID period. The scheme provided 5 kg of rice per household member each month and continues to provide a cushion during the period of recovery, with an additional food subsidy outlay of nearly USD45 billion apart from the regular food subsidy of nearly USD22 billion (Economic Times of India, April 2022). An empirical study conducted in four Indian states by the Centre for Sustainable Employment, Azim Premji University, revealed that the wages earned under MGNREGA compensated for 20-80 per cent of the wage loss during the lockdown. It also found that 39 per cent of households with job cards said that they did not get a single day's work even though they were willing to work. In 2022-23, there were 154 million workers in NREGA (The Hindu, October 2022).

Social protection of India's informal workers

Articles 38 to 43 of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India provide the basis for the state to introduce social protection measures in order to reduce inequality; promote social, economic and political justice; and ensure that citizens have adequate means of livelihood. It further provides the basis for efforts to ensure a living wage and decent work conditions; encourage cooperative enterprises and worker participation in management; and to provide for public assistance in cases of unemployment, disability, old age, sickness and poverty. Although not justiciable, the Directive Principles are explicit in their intent to inform law and policy on the primacy of peoples' welfare.

While there are different approaches on what constitutes social protection, the simple typology of tax-financed social assistance and social insurance financed by contributions is usually illustrative. The Indian Government has used both approaches over the past 75 years. Nonetheless, the vast majority of workers in the informal economy are excluded from either type of social protection measures, as they do not meet the eligibility criteria, lack information on their rights, do not have the documentary requirements or are unable to afford the contributions.

The following sections summarize India's social protection system for informal workers, starting with the schemes of the tax-funded National Social Assistance Programme for vulnerable and poor segments of the general population, in which a low-income threshold is the major determinant, which frequently leads to the exclusion of the working poor. Following that, statutory welfare boards for specific categories of workers such as mathadis or hamals (headload workers), construction workers and domestic workers are discussed. Then we look at the eSHRAM portal that provides for the registration of unorganized workers, as well as the self-financed, voluntary and contributory social protection schemes of life, accident, disability insurance and pensions for the general population, including workers in the informal economy.

This study will examine key factors that have facilitated and inhibited the inclusion of informal workers into these schemes and led KKP to explore innovative strategies to supplement and complement the national social protection system. KKP's approach to social protection has been diverse, factoring in the contribution of those who benefit from the work carried out by waste pickers, in addition to that of the government.

National Social Assistance Programme

Launched in 1995 by the Rural Development Department, the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is a scheme of the union government that aims to ameliorate the conditions of the poorer and more vulnerable sections of the population in urban and rural areas (Ministry of Rural Development). The union government provides a specified amount per beneficiary, which states are free to top-up. At the present time NSAP comprises five schemes:

1. Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme
2. Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme
3. Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme

4. National Family Benefit Scheme
5. Annapurna Scheme for free food grain to those not receiving a pension.

These cash or in-kind transfer schemes are targeted towards specific vulnerabilities of defined demographic groups, and the eligibility is means-tested. Vulnerabilities require certification by government officials, and only those below the poverty line are eligible. The poverty line itself is much contested, variably interpreted, infrequently updated, and applied differently to different schemes. In 2009, the government pegged the urban and rural poverty lines at INR32 (USD0.39) and INR26 (USD0.32) per person per day, respectively. Most of India's tax-financed social protection schemes are directed towards the poorest sections of the population, which are determined to fall below the poverty line. They do not offer much to the working poor in the informal economy who may not be destitute but nonetheless require social protection to manage risks and fulfill their social and economic potential.

The extensive documentary evidence for age, marital status, disability, proof of residence and domicile in the state, death and Aadhar-linked bank accounts that are required to be submitted represents a significant barrier for poorer populations to access social protection. Around 2006, the Government of India introduced the Aadhar identity card (Unique Identity Authority of India, n.d.), which has recently become mandatory for accessing government schemes and benefits. The Aadhar card is a unique 12-digit identification number with biometric authentication that is issued by the Unique Identity Authority of India (UIDAI) to all residents of India for identity verification and elimination of duplicate and fake identities. According to available information, UIDAI had issued 1.316 million Aadhar cards by 31 October 2021. In India – where the registration of births and deaths became mandatory only in 1969, institutional deliveries hovered at 41 per cent till 2005–6, and most marriages are still not registered – production of documentary evidence is a daunting task for many, in particular informal workers. As a result, intended beneficiaries of social protection programmes often are unable to negotiate the complexities of the application processes – for Aadhar as well as specific benefits – and often fall prey to “agents” who work the system for the appropriate price. There have been attempts on the part of union and state governments to use digital technology to reduce graft and simplify the process. However, the government-run Common Service Centres that are supposed to help intended beneficiaries negotiate the application process at predetermined rates also sometimes exploit the situation by charging in excess.

State-level welfare boards for informal workers

Workers in the informal economy do not have formal wage and employment contracts, access to social security, regulations of working conditions or security of tenure. Others are own-account workers, home-based workers, or carry out their work in public spaces or private premises. Some social protection, however, is provided through welfare boards for informal workers.

The practice of creating welfare funds and welfare boards for providing social security and regulating the employment of such workers has been extant in India for decades. The central boards constituted through acts of parliament include those for workers in mining operations, film and cinema workers, bidi (rolled tobacco sticks) rollers, and more recently construction workers. They are funded by cess levied on manufactured products

or on consumption for the provision of medical benefits, group insurance, housing and other benefits to registered informal workers. States such as Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh also have established funds and boards for additional categories of workers (Ministry of Labour 2007). The Indian Constitution defines the legislative domains for the union and the state governments. Those that overlap are referred to as concurrent subjects. Labor is a concurrent subject, establishing responsibilities for both the union and the state governments.

This study will briefly cover the main features of the four welfare boards that exist in the state of Maharashtra¹, for 1) hamal and mathadi² workers, 2) domestic workers, 3) construction workers and 4) unorganized workers. The first two have been established through local legislation enacted by the state. The laws for construction workers and for unorganized workers, however, have been enacted by the Government of India and adopted by the Maharashtra government.

Maharashtra Mathadi Board

The *Maharashtra Mathadi, Hamal and Other Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare)* Act provides for the regulation of employment conditions and provision of welfare to notified scheduled employees in notified markets, factories, railway goods yards, freight agencies and transport establishments where the loading and unloading of goods take place³. This is done through autonomous, statutory, tripartite, geographical, district boards established under the Act; the boards have equal representation of the associations of employers and workers and the state. The boards are tasked with mandatory registration and maintenance of records of employers and workers, collecting and disbursing the wages and benefits due to the workers, formulating and implementing welfare measures and ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Act through its inspectors.

Welfare boards allow for multiple employers and payment of wages on a piece rate basis. Wage rates on piece-rate basis are negotiated with the employers by the workers and their unions and ratified by the boards. Depending upon the geographical location, employers are required to pay a levy, not exceeding 50 per cent, at the rates prescribed by the government. The levy in Pune, for example, is 35 per cent of the wages and is used for contribution towards certain statutory benefits, such as provident funds, paid leave, and the costs of administration of the board. The wages and the levy are to be deposited into the Mathadi Board.

¹ The state of Maharashtra in west India has a population of about 122 million. The districts that have shown the highest population growth rates of between 22 and 36 per cent are Thane, Pune, Aurangabad, Nandurbar and Nashik. The state houses the financial capital of the country, Mumbai, and is one of the most highly industrialized in the country. The state boasts of an economic growth rate of 12 per cent, contributes 14.2 per cent (highest) to the national GDP and has a per capita income of INR 200,000 (USD 2,421) (State Economic Survey Report 2021-22).

² “Mathadi” is a derivative from the word “Matha” which means head. A Mathadi is a worker who carries a load on his head. Oftentimes the load is carried on the back and/or shoulders.

³ Maharashtra Mathadi Hamal and Other Manual Workers (Regulation of Employment and Welfare) Act: https://mahakamgar.maharashtra.gov.in/writereaddata/Portal/Images/pdf/08_Pune_Mathadi_Hamal.pdf

A total of 72,449 employers and 115,963 workers are registered with the 36 mathadi boards that are currently operational in the state of Maharashtra. Details of the Pune board are provided in the table below as an example. More than 50 years after its enactment in 1969, the Mathadi Act conceptually remains a remarkable piece of legislation that offers scope for modification and adaptation to accommodate the majority of workers in the informal economy who do not have legally tenable employer employee wage relationships.

Table 1: Pune Mathadi Hamal and Other Manual Workers Board at a glance (2022)

| Pune Mathadi Hamal and Other Manual Workers Board | |
|---|---|
| Year of establishment | 1980 |
| Jurisdiction | Pune Municipal Corporation & the talukas (sub districts) of Shirur, Bhor, Baramati, Indapur, Velha, Daund, Purandar and Haveli |
| Board Staff | 24 positions (10 filled, 14 vacant) |
| Registered employers | 4,521 |
| Registered workers | 8,569 |
| Rate of Levy | 35% |
| Apportionment of levy in % | 22 |
| Provident fund | 12 |
| Gratuity | 5 |
| Diwali bonus | 11.5 |
| Paid leave & holidays | 1.5+1.5 |
| Workmen's Compensation | 1 |
| Board Administration | 2.5 |
| Total average monthly wages deposited with the board | INR75,758,000 (USD917,064) |
| Total average monthly levy | INR26,515,300 (USD31,658) |
| Medical benefit | Treatment at Seventh Day Adventists Hospital (reimbursement limit of INR20,000 (USD244) for hospitalization and INR50,000 (USD611) for hospitalization for major illnesses) |

Source: Author's research, information provided by the board

Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board

The Maharashtra Domestic Workers Welfare Board Act was enacted in 2009. While it was intended to be modelled on the lines of the Mathadi Act, it has been found wanting both in design as well as implementation. One of the main strengths of the Mathadi Boards is their financial independence and autonomy because the revenue stream of levies payable by employers is an integral part of the Act. The Domestic Workers Boards, on the other hand, rely on government grants, not only for their own functioning but for the welfare benefits to be provided to domestic workers as well. Employers of domestic workers are not required to contribute to welfare benefits. The dependence on government funding is a serious drawback, and the promised welfare schemes have

not been implemented because of funding constraints. Domestic workers were among the worst hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. Restrictions on mobility and the fear that they would carry the virus were responsible for job losses among domestic workers. Two years into the pandemic, the Maharashtra government offered cash transfers of a paltry INR1,500 (USD18) to ameliorate the situation of domestic workers registered with the Domestic Workers Boards.

Maharashtra Building and Construction Workers Board

The Maharashtra Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board was established in 2011 by the Maharashtra Government, following the issuing of the Maharashtra Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) rules in 2007. The rules function in tandem with the Building and Other Workers Welfare Cess Act of 1996 and provide for the collection of cess from employers at the rate of 1 per cent of the total cost of construction, excluding the cost of the land. The registration fee of INR1 and the annual subscription of INR1 paid by the workers are also credited to the board. Unlike in the Mathadi Act, the levy from the employer is not collected as a proportion of the wages paid to the construction worker, but rather the total construction cost. The problem with this is that there is no link between the individual worker's wage/earnings and the cess that is collected, so no portion is directly credited towards the benefits for that worker. The cess is credited into a common pool from which registered workers are provided welfare benefits.

Since 2007, a total of 1,751,878 workers from 39 districts are registered with the Maharashtra Building and Construction Workers Board, of which 1,041,510 are active (31/10/2022). A sum of INR4,503 million was distributed as benefits to 382,248 beneficiaries between 2007 and October 2022⁴. The total cess collected by the board from 2007 to September 2022 was INR129 billion, of which INR59 billion was spent on benefits and INR2 billion on administrative costs (1.5 per cent)⁵. Construction workers registered with the board are eligible for a total of 20 schemes that include:

- Social security schemes (wedding expenses, midday meals, premium for the government's life, disability and accident insurance, contribution to old age pension scheme, and skill training).
- Education schemes for school and college going children.
- Health schemes, including maternity benefits.
- Financial benefit schemes that include accident benefits, housing schemes and funeral assistance.

The central challenge of the board is ensuring the registration of all potentially eligible workers, which is complicated by the structure of the construction industry. Construction workers are usually migrants, hired by labor contractors through kinship and other networks. Their migrant status, limited inability to speak the regional language and often low literacy levels render them vulnerable to labour exploitation. Oftentimes

⁴ District wise total registrations and Act: <https://mahabocw.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/District-wise-total-registrations-and-active-workers.pdf>

⁵ Maharashtra Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board: <https://mahabocw.in/statistical-information/>

they are paid lump sum advances in their native villages and live onsite in conditions resembling bondage. This is particularly true of brick kiln workers, who also are covered under the Act. As a result, the board tends to be cash rich with relatively low benefit payments levels.

Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act and eSHRAM

The Government of India enacted The Unorganised Workers' Social Security Act in 2008⁶ after which it established the National Social Security Board and the National Social Security Fund of INR10 billion in 2011. The Act defines "unorganized worker" as a home-based worker, self-employed worker or a wage worker in the unorganized sector and includes a worker in the organized sector who is not covered by a number of listed Acts that already targeted the poor. The Act does not incorporate any revenue source, and the implementation is contingent upon government grants. As a result, the Act remains not fully implemented at the national level.

The Government of Maharashtra, however, has appointed a Development Commissioner responsible for unorganized workers and established Janashree Bima Yojana, later renamed Aam Admi Bima Yojana, a contributory life and accident insurance scheme for 122 occupations. The Maharashtra government also set up a welfare board for its 36.5 million unorganized workers.

More recently, the Government of India's Ministry of Labor and Employment developed the eSHRAM portal for creating a National Database of Unorganized Workers (NDUW), which will be seeded with Aadhar. It has details of name, occupation, address, occupation type, educational qualification, skill types and family details, etc. This information is considered relevant for enhancing the employability of informal workers and to extend social security schemes. It is the first-ever national database of unorganized workers, including migrant workers, construction workers, gig and platform workers. The Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act features in the list of labor legislations on the eSHRAM website, and registration of unorganized workers is part of the mandate of the Act. However, the relationship between the eSHRAM registration and the National Social Security Board is not clear.

Any individual aged between 16 and 59 years who is not enrolled in the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), the Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) or the government-funded National Pension Scheme (NPS), and who is not an income tax payee can register on the portal. There is no charge for registration. The Aadhar number, mobile number linked with Aadhar and a savings bank account with an Indian Financial System Code are required for registration. A Universal Account Number (UAN) is a 12-digit number uniquely assigned to each unorganized worker after registration on eSHRAM portal. The UAN will be a permanent number, i.e., once assigned it will remain unchanged for the worker's lifetime.

The registration of unorganized workers under the eSHRAM portal in Maharashtra commenced in 2021, and the data show that 13.34 million workers of the estimated 36 million workers in the state have been registered. Women account for 51 per cent of

⁶ Unorganized Workers Social Security Act, 2008: <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2008-33.pdf>

the registrations, and 57 per cent of the total registrations are aged between 18 and 40 years. The occupation breakdown shows that the highest registrations are in agriculture, construction, domestic work and apparel. Half the registrations have been done at the government's Common Service Centers, and the other half are self-registrations. The number of registrations is encouraging, especially since the process commenced during the second year of the pandemic. However, for now, the only benefit for those registered is the payment of a premium of INR12 (USD0.15) by the union Ministry of Labor and Employment for the Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) accident insurance scheme for just the first year.

Many voluntary and contributory social security schemes are mentioned on the eSHRAM website. The most relevant ones are presented in the table below. The schemes are not exclusively for informal workers, and the enrolment numbers in Table 2 are for the general population, not informal workers. They are considered to be universal by the Government of India because they can be availed by any resident having a bank account, including savings accounts in post offices. The life, accident and disability insurance schemes mentioned in the table are meant to offer affordable options for the general uninsured population, including those working in the informal economy. The pension scheme, on the other hand, is specifically meant for workers in the informal economy. There is some discrepancy in the data related to cumulative enrolments that is reflected in Table 2.

Table 2: Voluntary and contributory social protection schemes of the Government of India

| | Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (Life insurance) | Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (Accident and disability insurance) | Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-dhan (PM-SYM) (Pension) |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Eligibility at entry point | 18-49 years (Terminates after the age of 55) | 18-69 years (Terminates after the age of 55) | 18-40-year-old self-declared unorganized worker earning less than INR15,000 (USD183) per month. |
| Annual subscription and mode | INR436 (USD5.3) Auto debit from bank account based on standing instructions | INR20 (USD0.24) Auto debit from bank account based on standing instructions | INR660 to 2,400 (USD6 to 30) depending on age. Auto debit from bank account based on standing instructions. Matching contribution from union government |
| Benefit | INR200,000 (USD2,439) | INR200,000 (USD2,439) | Monthly pension of INR3,000 (USD36) post age 60 years. |
| Implementing Agency | Banks and Post Offices; Department of Financial Services | Banks and Post Offices; Department of Financial Services | Common Service Centres; Ministry of Labour and Employment |
| Enrolment | 138 million cumulative enrolments since launch in 2015 112 million cumulative enrolments as of 27/10/20 | 302 million cumulative enrolments 258 million cumulative enrolments as of 27/10/2021 | 4.4 million cumulative enrolments since launch in 2019 |

Source: Department of Financial Services, Ministry of Finance: <https://jansuraksha.gov.in/>

The social protection schemes listed for workers registered on the eSHRAM portal are self-financed. There is no contribution from the government or from the employers. The welfare boards are usually statutory and sectoral, which means there is a dual process of pursuing the enactment of the law and then its implementation, both of which are

lengthy processes that require substantial bureaucratic and political support. Besides, employment relationships have become more complex. For example, many years ago, KKP KPs attempted to explore the inclusion of waste pickers in the Mathadi Act, which was difficult because their relationship with the scrap traders was a sale purchase transaction of commodities. Likewise, street vendors are also sellers of commodities, but tracing the value chain to the manufacturers proves to be a challenge. The multiplicity of employers and tasks carried out by domestic workers become difficult for identifying a source of revenue. A regulatory framework that does not incorporate a source of revenue has little value. Therefore, informal workers and their organizations do not just push for the inclusion of informal workers into the national social protection system, but also develop their own schemes to improve working conditions and access to social protection based upon their understanding of the political economy of the sector.

The remainder of this report will focus on informal workers in recycling value chains and their efforts to gain decent working conditions and social protection, starting with an introduction into their livelihoods and contexts.

Membership-Based Organizations of Waste Pickers in Pune

This case study documents the innovative explorations and experiences of five membership-based sister organizations of waste pickers to ensure social protection to the estimated 9,000 waste pickers in Pune city. They comprise:

- KKP KP, the trade union, which is the oldest and the overarching organization that protects the interests of waste pickers.
- Kagad Kach Patra Nagri Sahakari Pat Sanstha (KKPNSPS), the credit cooperative that provides the institutional framework for savings and credit to members of KKP KP.
- SWaCH Pune Seva Sahakari Sanstha (SWaCH), the cooperative that provides waste pickers opportunities for decent employment and assured access to recyclable materials.
- SWaCH+ Seva Sahakari Sanstha (SWaCH+), the cooperative that provides decent employment in waste enterprises.
- Kashtakari Panchayat Trust (KPT), which is not membership based and provides research and administrative support to organizations of waste pickers and functions as a bridge between the organizations of workers in the informal economy.

Each of the organizations is a separately registered legal entity with its own governing board and sets of rules. KKP KP has the largest membership. The other organizations were established for specific purposes and have a subset of the KKP KP's membership. All members of the sister organizations are members of KKP KP, but the reverse may not be the case. KKP KP members may be part of the KKPNSPS if they want to participate in savings and credit schemes, or of SWaCH if they are involved in door-to-door waste collection, as membership of multiple entities is permitted.

KKP KP has attempted to work into its social protection strategy the government and non-government, institutional and non-institutional actors that waste pickers encounter

in their work of solid waste and materials handling. The first is the household, office or shop to which waste pickers provide direct doorstep waste collection services through the SWaCH cooperative. The second is the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), which is legally obligated to collect and scientifically manage the city's waste. The third are market-driven aggregators of recyclable materials that supply recyclable materials to the manufacturing industry. The fourth is the manufacturing industry itself, which is increasingly being held accountable by environmental groups, and the state through Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) policies for the materials produced by them that enter the waste stream after usage.

KKPKP recognizes the chasm between aspiration, advocacy and actual accrual of entitlements from the state. It has sought to address this internally by ensuring that all activities, programs and institutions under the aegis of the KKPKP contribute a share of their revenue/profit/administrative costs and subscription fees towards a fund that is used to provide waste pickers welfare benefits not yet realized by the state. Simultaneously, KKPKP has advocated for, and created a visibility within the city, for waste pickers and their organizations as valued partners in the city's growth, development and culture, encouraging ongoing and sustained support from city-based institutions, philanthropies, residents, elected representatives and corporates who contribute towards benefits for waste pickers. Consequently, KKPKP has looked beyond the government as the sole "benefactor" or "provider" and sought to bring into the mix all those who benefit from the work carried out by waste pickers, as well as the contributions of waste pickers themselves.

Overview of the waste collection and recycling value chain in Pune

Spread over 516 square kilometers, the PMC has an estimated population of 4.5 million people and roughly 1 million households. The city generates 2,058 metric tons of waste daily, of which 1,783 metric tons are collected. Mixed waste accounts for 17 per cent of the waste collected; 43 per cent is dry waste and 40 per cent is wet waste. Another 150 metric tons of wet waste are composted in situ by small and bulk waste generators, and 125 metric tons goes directly for recycling.⁷ Source segregation of waste is mandatory, and waste generators are required to maintain their organic, non-organic and sanitary waste in separate receptacles. The municipal body in turn has to organize a system of door-to-door collection of waste and to ensure diversion of municipal solid waste from landfills into processing. These requirements were introduced after the notification of the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000 and 2016, under the Environment Protection Act (EPA) of 1986. The 2016 rules mandate segregation of waste at source and make institutions, hotels, large residential complexes, as bulk waste generators responsible for managing their waste. The new rules also introduced user fees to be paid by waste generators and introduced the idea of integrating waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers and other informal waste workers in municipal solid waste management. Rules in respect of different types of waste such as plastic, electronic waste, biomedical waste, hazardous waste and construction and demolition waste have been notified since. The most recent changes in the policy space are the ban on 19 single-use plastic items from 1 July 2022 as part of implementation of the Plastic

⁷ PMC presentation to citizen representatives dated 28th July 2021 under the Right to Information Act

Waste Management Rules 2021 and the guidelines in respect of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) that were issued in February 2022.

Environment is the legislative domain of the union government, while the states can enact legislation pertaining to solid waste management and the management and functioning of urban local bodies. The Government of Maharashtra enacted the Maharashtra Non-Biodegradable Garbage Control Act in 2006 after floods wreaked havoc in its metropolitan capital, Mumbai. It is under this Act that the state government first issued the Maharashtra Plastic and Thermocol Products (Manufacture, Usage, Sale, Transport, Handling and Storage) Notification in March 2018. Further amendments were made to the notification in 2018, 2019 and 2022. The latest amendment mentions that the manufacturers using plastic and thermocol in packaging shall diligently implement buy-back mechanism and put in place EPR plans, in collaboration and coordination with existing “rag pickers”⁸, scrap traders and retailers.

The responsibilities of the urban local bodies were set out in the 12th Schedule of the Indian Constitution after the enactment of the seventy-fourth constitutional amendment in 1992. Among these is the responsibility for public health, sanitation conservancy and solid waste management. It is within this legal framework that the Pune Municipal Corporation carries out its responsibility for solid waste management.

Stages of waste management

Primary door-to-door waste collection from households, offices and shops is carried out by 3,676 SWaCH collectors from 950,237 properties, and another 386,437 properties are serviced by the PMC and other private collectors, leaving uncovered only 56,950 of the 1,502,447 properties in Pune. SWaCH collectors collect waste largely using non-motorized push carts and retain the recyclables for sale. They hand over the balance (non-recyclables, organic waste, sanitary waste, domestic hazardous waste) to the motorized secondary municipal waste collection system in segregated streams at 823 feeder points. The SWaCH collectors sort and store the recyclable materials in the 44 constructed Material Recovery Centres (MRC) and 260 Material Recovery Kiosks (MRK) for sale to scrap traders⁹. The MRCs and the MRKs are either constructed directly by the PMC or facilitated by them where SWaCH has been able to raise corporate sponsorship.

The secondary waste system begins at the feeder points from where the PMC transports the waste to the seven municipal transfer stations across the city using 525 vehicles. The PMC has constructed and contracted out Material Recovery Facilities (MRF) to companies that segregate the dry waste brought in by the municipal “bell ringing” vehicles and private collection vehicles. The PMC pays companies operating the 12 MRFs tipping fees for segregating the waste on a tonnage basis.

⁸ The term rag pickers came into existence possibly because rags were the first items to be collected for the paper industry. KKP uses and encourages the use of the term waste pickers or scrap collectors, because that is more comprehensive of the recyclable materials that they collect. The term recyclers preferred by some, is a sanitized misrepresentation of the work. Some authors use the term reclaimers because they reclaim materials. The Global Alliance of Waste Pickers uses the term waste pickers for the collectors of post-consumer recyclable materials from urban solid waste.

⁹ SWaCH report to PMC for the month of May 2022.

The tertiary waste collection system involves the transfer of waste from the transfer stations or MRFs to the processing units. The PMC has contracted out waste processing to companies that carry out composting of 400 metric tons per day (MTPD) in 15 units; bio-methanation of 125 MTPD in 25 units and Refuse Derived Fuel of 350 MTPD in one unit. The PMC has separate collection systems, either directly operated or contracted, for the collection of hotel and restaurant waste, biomedical waste, construction and demolition waste and garden waste.

Only rejects from the MRFs are transported to the Uruli landfill on the outskirts of the city, which has been operational for at least a quarter of a century. The civic body's search for new dumping grounds has met with resistance from villagers, who have watched the degradation and loss of value of the lands at Uruli.

The intersection of municipal solid waste management and recycling

The solid waste management and the recycling value chain intersect soon after the primary waste collection stage. Apart from SWaCH collectors, the city also has itinerant waste collectors and itinerant waste buyers, organized under the aegis of the KKP KP. Collectively, they further sort, grade and sell the recyclables to the small- and medium-sized scrap traders that dot the city. Further value addition takes place through various processes of sorting, grading, cutting, washing, baling, shredding as the recyclable materials transition through various sizes and levels of aggregators until they reach the reprocessing units. The smaller aggregators are usually registered enterprises but transact in the informal economy. The recycling value chain, though market-driven and robust, is under threat of being displaced by larger corporate players (Chikarmane and Narayanan 2012).

Waste Pickers' Claim-Making for Social Protection

Making claims towards the city and on the municipal budget

The first woman Mayor of Pune presided over the issue of identity cards to waste pickers in 1996. The PMC was the country's first urban local body to accede to the demand of KKP KP to endorse identity cards issued to waste pickers in recognition of their contribution to solid waste management and recycling. This first official milestone marked three years of struggle after the constitution of the KKP KP in 1993. The ingenuity of unacknowledged workers came to the fore in ways that the identity cards were used to establish their legitimacy. Itinerant waste buyers used their cards as collateral if they did not have enough cash to pick up a load of scrap. Some even used it as surety in the court.

In 2001, the ILO commissioned a study of scrap collectors, scrap traders and recycling enterprises; it mapped the recycling chain in Pune (Chikarmane, Deshpande and Lakshmi Narayan, 2001). It placed waste pickers and itinerant waste buyers firmly at the base of the recycling pyramid, as street entrepreneurs who collected and diverted recyclable materials from streets and the landfills into recycling, saving the PMC millions of rupees in waste transport costs. Their contribution was quantified. The study also documented the punishing work conditions of waste pickers and the risks to their health and well-being. Waste pickers paid for the city's recycling with their own health. "Tumche arogya amche kay? Tumchi swachata amche kay?" (We protect your health,

what about ours? We clean your city, what happens to us?) became the rallying slogan, assisted by a parliamentary question.¹⁰ On the subject, KKP KP demanded medical insurance and, in 2002, the PMC became the first urban local body to provide medical insurance to waste pickers from its annual budget. KKP KP made the strategic decision at this point to propose the use of existing or modified government-approved schemes to provide benefits to waste pickers. The Jan Arogya Policy was one such product that covered hospitalization, and the PMC accepted the proposal submitted by the New India Assurance Company among others. Although the rising hospitalization costs have reduced the benefit of the insurance scheme, it continues to date, supplemented by other municipal, state and union government health schemes.

It must be noted here that the historic seventy-fourth constitutional amendment, which aided democratic decentralization and devolution of powers to local governments, preceded the changes mentioned above (identity cards and the inclusion of waste pickers in the municipal budget). The 12th Schedule of the Indian Constitution that set out the powers, authority and responsibilities of municipalities was added by this amendment in 1992. Public health, sanitation, conservancy, solid waste management and urban poverty alleviation featured in the list of 18 items in the 12th Schedule. It opened up new spaces for engagement with the organs of the state, in this case, municipalities. At the time, KKP KP, the newly formed organization of waste pickers who lived and worked in the city or in the urbanizing periphery, were quick to use this opportunity to engage with the municipalities of Pune and Pimpri Chinchwad, a neighbouring city.

KKP KP is a membership-based organization with primary accountability to its membership. The choice of the level of government to work with is an important consideration. The significance of engaging with local government for workers in the informal economy who reside in and serve the city is a strategic choice from which KKP KP has not departed. KKP KP chose the local self-government that was directly responsible for the provision of solid waste management services. The canvas was therefore local, small and manageable, although the vision was much wider. KKP KP's approach also did not foreclose the need to ally with other organizations of waste pickers, organizations of other informal workers or with environmental and other movements.

KKP KP-Pune municipal schemes for the welfare of waste pickers

Sometimes all it takes is for a concerned politician to make the appropriate connections. It was in 1998 that a manager of the Life Insurance Corporation of India approached her friend, the Mayor of Pune, about a newly introduced contributory government life and disability insurance scheme (Social Security Group Insurance Scheme or SSGIS) for self-help groups and associations. The mayor asked KKP KP if they were interested. KKP KP's Representatives Council vetoed the idea at the outset. The proportion of de facto women-headed households is high among waste pickers. They were open to the idea of contributing to a retirement fund for their old age. However, the idea of paying to bequeath their hard-earned money to their oftentimes drunk and violent spouses was unacceptable. The untimely, accidental death of a young female member with

¹⁰ In this particular case, a Member of Parliament cited the study carried out by the ILO and enquired as to why no health insurance was provided to waste pickers.

school-age children led to a review and change of heart. The Representatives Council resolved to campaign among members to enroll into the scheme that provided for a lump sum settlement in the event of natural and accidental death or disability of the insured person. Members also learned that they were free to choose their own nominee. For years thereafter, until 2015, waste pickers paid their own insurance premium to the KKP KP towards the group Janashree Bima Yojana (JBY) and later the Aam Admi Bima Yojana (AABY).

The first iteration of the SWaCH Coop (2008-2013) had provided for the welfare benefits for waste pickers as part of the obligation of the Pune Municipal Corporation. The actual benefits to be provided were not detailed, and neither was there adequate budgetary provision. Besides, itinerant waste pickers and buyers who were not part of SWaCH were excluded. KKP KP proposed a package of welfare schemes that would extend to all waste pickers within the jurisdiction of the PMC. Modification of existing municipal and government schemes so as to include waste pickers was proposed by KKP KP. Two municipal departments were part of the negotiations for formulating the proposal, the Solid Waste Management Department and the Urban Community Development Department (later renamed Social Development Department). The municipal's general body approved the proposal tabled by the Municipal Commissioner for the annual provision of welfare benefits amounting to INR27.4 million for 6,000 waste pickers. The schemes and details of their implementation are given below.

Medical insurance: Jan Arogya Bima Policy (JABY)

The JABY is a national group medical insurance scheme that offers reimbursement of hospitalization costs not exceeding INR5,000 (USD60) each year. It is implemented through public sector insurance companies. The data available with KKP KP show that since inception, a minimum of 3,707 and a maximum of 8,590 waste pickers were insured annually under the scheme. The individual annual premium varied between INR70 and 140 (USD0.85 and 1.69) depending upon the age of the insured person. The insurer settled 1,652 claims amounting to INR6.7 million against premium of INR9.5 million paid by the PMC, averaging claim payout of INR4,052 per claim between 2003 and 2021.

Life, accident and disability insurance

KKP KP's experience with a government-approved insurance scheme is explained here in some detail to highlight some of the issues of the scheme-based approaches to social protection for informal workers. Launched in 2000 by the Life Insurance Corporation of India (public sector undertaking) the Janashree Bima Yojana (JBY) replaced the SSGIS (Social Security Group Insurance Scheme), which was implemented through associations and self-help groups of the urban and rural poor. The scheme was co-contributory: half the annual premium of INR200 (USD2.42) was paid from the government Social Security Fund, a quarter by Maharashtra state and the balance by the insured person. The PMC paid the premium for the waste pickers. Insurance cover of INR30,000 (USD363) for natural death and INR75,000 (USD907) for accidental death, and proportionate cover for disability was provided under the scheme. In addition, schoolchildren of the insured were provided an annual scholarship of INR1,200 (USD145) per child in classes IX-XII.

A change of government often leads to changes in government schemes. In 2004, the scheme was renamed the Aam Admi Bima Yojana (AABY), but the basic structure was

retained. The radical change took place in 2017, when the union government launched its flagships programmes: Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyot Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) (Table 2 for details). There were other significant changes to the structure of the insurance scheme as well. The age for enrollment into the JBY/AABY was 18 to 59 years. The PMJJBY reduced the maximum age for enrolment to 50 years, and the maximum age for renewal to 54 years. Given that the life expectancy rate in India is 70 years, and vulnerabilities increase as age advances, the scheme unjustly excludes those above the age of 55 years, even if they are willing to pay the premium. The sudden change meant that the previously insured waste pickers in Pune were left bereft of insurance cover from January 2018 until May 2022, which includes the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the PMC approved payment of the increased premium for the PMJJBY/PMSBY schemes, the process of completing the insurance formalities is still ongoing, because enrolment into the schemes is through the banking system, for which mobile phone and Aadhar-linked bank accounts are mandatory.

Table 3: Details of life, accident and disability insurance of KKP KP members

| Year | Social Security Group Insurance Scheme (SSGISS) | | | | | | Janashree Bima Yojana (JBY) /Aam Admi Bima Yojana (AABY) | | | | | | Total | | | | |
|------|---|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | Number insured | Premiums paid (INR) | Premiums paid (USD) | Number of claims | Claim amount (INR) | Claim amount (USD) | Number insured | Premiums paid (INR) | Premiums paid (USD) | Number of claims | Claim amount (INR) | Claim amount (USD) | Total number insured | Total claims | Total claims settled | Total claim amount (INR) | Total claim amount (USD) |
| 2007 | 1,582 | 39,550 | 477 | 33 | 185,000 | 2,232 | 4,630 | 231,500 | 2,794 | 1 | 30,000 | 362 | 6,212 | 40 | 34 | 215,000 | 2,594 |
| 2008 | 4,492 | 44,750 | 540 | 8 | 40,000 | 483 | 1,790 | 224,600 | 2,710 | 13 | 390,000 | 4,706 | 6,282 | 44 | 21 | 430,000 | 5,189 |
| 2009 | 4,095 | 63,625 | 768 | 8 | 40,000 | 483 | 2,545 | 204,750 | 2,471 | 19 | 615,000 | 7,421 | 6,640 | 40 | 27 | 655,000 | 7,904 |
| 2010 | 3,486 | 77,800 | 939 | 8 | 40,000 | 483 | 3,112 | 174,300 | 2,103 | 15 | 450,000 | 5,430 | 6,598 | 32 | 23 | 490,000 | 5,913 |
| 2011 | 2,671 | 66,775 | 806 | 5 | 30,000 | 362 | 4,214 | 210,700 | 2,543 | 18 | 585,000 | 7,059 | 6,885 | 47 | 23 | 615,000 | 7,421 |
| 2012 | 2,219 | 55,475 | 669 | 5 | 25,000 | 302 | 4,866 | 243,300 | 2,936 | 22 | 660,000 | 7,964 | 7,085 | 52 | 27 | 685,000 | 8,266 |
| 2013 | 3,064 | 76,600 | 924 | 1 | 5,000 | 60 | 4,415 | 220,750 | 2,664 | 9 | 270,000 | 3,258 | 7,479 | 28 | 10 | 275,000 | 3,318 |
| 2014 | 839 | 103,175 | 1245 | 1 | 5,000 | 60 | 4,127 | 206,350 | 2,490 | 13 | 390,000 | 4,706 | 4,966 | 29 | 14 | 395,000 | 4,767 |
| 2015 | 1,073 | 26,825 | 324 | | | | 2,634 | 131,700 | 1,589 | 23 | 825,000 | 9,955 | 3,707 | 24 | 23 | 825,000 | 9,955 |
| 2016 | | | | | | | 6,049 | 302,450 | 3,650 | 18 | 540,000 | 6,516 | 6,049 | 18 | 18 | 540,000 | 6,516 |
| 2017 | | | | | | | 6,187 | 309,350 | 3,733 | 22 | 660,000 | 7,964 | 6,187 | 28 | 22 | 660,000 | 7,964 |

NOTE: Waste pickers did not have any life and disability insurance cover from the PMC from January 2018 till mid 2022 because of the change in the policy and schemes of the Government of India. The PMC accepted to pay for the PMJJBY-PMSBY in 2022, after which the enrolment commenced. The process has been fraught with difficulties. Bank accounts of many waste pickers were rendered inoperable because they had no balance after the banks levied fines because they did not maintain a minimum account balance; the mandatory linking of Aadhaar, cell phone numbers and bank accounts was not completed; the banks complained of inadequate staff to manage the additional workload of mass membership into the scheme. Bank consumers are not familiar with the types of bank accounts that can be opened. The banks usually open savings bank accounts that are subject to minimum balance requirements so that they can charge for services and fines. Account holders who have not paid their fines on Basic Savings Banks Accounts (BSBD) accounts are exempt from minimum account balance. The banks are reluctant to convert savings accounts into BSBD. On 27 January 2023, 3,068 forms for the schemes were completed, of which the bank registration of 2,567 members was completed. Of the 26 waste pickers that died in 2022, only seven were insured. The remaining 19 could not be insured because they were over 50 years old and therefore barred by the rules of the scheme. This clearly illustrates the problems in implementation of schemes.

Pension: Swavalamban Yojana, Atal Pension Yojana and Shramyogi Madhan Yojana
The demand for pension is probably one of the foremost demands of workers in the informal economy. KKP KP proposed the inclusion of waste pickers into a government-backed, contributory, micro-pension plan, monitored by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority of India and launched by the Government of India in 2010. The PMC was to be the co-contributor with an annual contribution of INR3,000 (USD36) per worker. The defined contribution scheme was open to unorganized workers between the ages of 18 and 40 years at the time of enrolment. Changes in government also led to the changes in this scheme. KKP KP has yet to put up the proposal for implementing the latest scheme the Shramyogi Mandhan Yojana (Table 2 for details).

Health care: Scheme for the urban poor

The solid waste management department of the PMC is expected to pay the annual subscription fee for enrolling waste pickers into the PMC's scheme for inpatient cashless treatment of the enrolled urban poor at a concessional rate of 50 per cent in hospitals empaneled by the PMC. The other half is paid directly to the hospital by the PMC. The family coverage not exceeding INR150,000 is available for an annual subscription fee of INR200 (USD2.42). The amount for the coverage of waste pickers was to be paid through interdepartmental transfer of the annual subscription fee to the health department. Although the transfer of subscription fee has not taken place, KKP KP members have been utilizing and benefiting from the scheme. According to the data provided by KKP KP, 78 members utilized the scheme between 2019 and 2022, the benefit not exceeding the maximum permissible amount of INR11.7 million. The reason

for the low utilization is that the KKP KP assists members to use other hospitalization schemes of the Maharashtra government that allow for free treatment, whereas the PMC scheme offers only a 50 per cent concession.

Education: Assistance to children of those in cleaning occupations

The PMC provides an annual educational grant to children of waste pickers. A maximum of two children per family in high school are eligible for assistance of INR5,000 (USD60) each per annum. The data available with KKP KP show that 622 children of waste pickers received education assistance of INR3.07 million under this scheme between 2019 and 2021.

The PMC also offers one-time merit scholarships to children who excel in classes 10 (INR15,000) and 12 (INR25,000) (USD181 and 302). The qualifying threshold has been reduced for children of waste pickers in view of their disadvantaged status. The data available at KKP KP shows that 47 children of waste pickers received INR0.84 million (USD10,168) as scholarships between 2019 and 2021.

SWaCH-Pune Municipal Corporation Memorandum of Understanding and ensuing entitlements

The SWaCH Pune Seva Sahakari Sanstha Maryadit (henceforth SWaCH Coop) was formally incorporated in 2007, pursuant to a resolution of the PMC general body. Preceded by a two-year pan-city pilot, the resolution approved the Municipal Commissioner's proposal for the formation of a waste picker-owned cooperative that would carry out the work of daily door-to-door collection of household and commercial waste, as mandated by the Municipal Solid Waste Management and Handling Rules, 2000, and the Maharashtra Non-Biodegradable Garbage Control Act, 2006. Waste generators were required to maintain and hand over the organic, recyclable and sanitary waste in separate containers. SWaCH, the acronym for Solid Waste Collection and Handling, means "clean" in the regional language. The unique pro-poor public-private partnership was conceived as a tripartite arrangement between the residents of Pune (service users), KKP KP and the municipal corporation. In the model, the PMC finances the collection and safety equipment, the management costs for the administrative structure and the worker welfare benefits. Service users pay the user fee negotiated between the PMC and the KKP KP. In return, workers provide an efficient and accountable waste collection service, compliant with the Solid Waste Management rules and regulations.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the SWaCH Coop and the PMC set out the terms as well the obligations of all the parties and the schedules for provision of equipment and grants. The PMC was expected to pay a small subsidy towards waste collection from slum households. The first five-year iteration of the MoU extended from 2008 to 2013, after which there was a two-year hiatus. SWaCH had to let go of staff and operated with very few employees, paid through worker contributions in the period leading up to the renewal of the MoU. Nonetheless, SWaCH managed to continue uninterrupted services because the waste pickers were paid directly by the residents. The uninterrupted provision of service during the hiatus demonstrated the acceptance, sustainability and the embedding of the model. It encouraged and facilitated the second iteration that was initiated by the PMC from 2016 to 2021. Among the enhancements in the second iteration were the provision for regular payment of the slum subsidy of INR10

(USD0.12) per slum household per month and revision of the user fee from INR10 to INR50 (USD0.51) per non-slum household and INR30 (USD0.36) per slum household per month with provision for automatic annual escalation of 10 per cent, i.e., INR5 (USD0.06) each year. These changes were beneficial in enhancing the incomes for workers and also in the equity of service provision to slum and low-income housing. Low-income households consume less and generate fewer recyclable materials. The slum subsidy is meant to make up the loss and is paid to the waste collectors through SWaCH.

As per the agreement, the management, training and outreach costs were to be transferred to SWaCH, but procurement of the equipment as per the schedule was the responsibility of the PMC. Not only were there excessive delays in remitting the grants on the part of the PMC, but the procurement schedules for the materials were not adhered to. The inefficiency and lack of transparency in the process meant that workers had to do without equipment or had to source it from elsewhere. SWaCH, too, had to borrow on occasion to meet the requirements. That said, even if delayed, the dues did come in, often on account of pressure and protests from SWaCH members. After matters came to a head, the PMC paid the dues just prior to entering into the agreement for the second iteration.

Tapping into state and central government entitlements

KKP KP advocates for and facilitates the inclusion of waste pickers in state and central government schemes that are part of the NSAP as well as others that cover health and education. The most notable among the Government of India's education schemes is the high school scholarship for children of those working in cleaning occupations. Originally intended for manual scavengers, tanners and flayers, the scheme was extended to include children of waste pickers in 2010 after a long battle spearheaded by KKP KP. Financial assistance of INR3,000 (USD36) per child is provided to children schooling in classes 1 to 10. The data available with KKP KP show that 346 children received scholarships amounting to INR640,000 (USD7,747) in 2019-20.

The most important health scheme is Maharashtra Government's publicly funded private insurance scheme, the Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan Arogya Yojana (MJPJAY), which has operated in tandem with the government of India's Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) since 2020. The cashless hospitalization schemes cover a range of procedures in empaneled hospitals. The data provided by KKP KP show that 60 members benefitted under the MJPJAY between 2019 and 2022.

Making claims towards the urban resident

SWaCH Collector Connect

The SWaCH Coop scripted the exit of its waste picker members from the drudge labour of scouring the streets, bins and landfills to transition into service providers, with some attendant benefits. SWaCH put a face and a voice to the worker, and waste pickers set about building enduring relationships with the residents whose homes they serviced. They were sometimes cordial and mutually beneficial, and contentious at other times, as is the case with all relationships, particularly those between "employer-employee". The sympathy for someone who had to work in garbage easily gave way to demands for better service standards and cordial behavior from SWaCH collectors. SWaCH collectors repeatedly and publicly maintained that they were workers and expected to be treated

like human beings. That said, there were many gains from the relationships, not only in mutual understanding but in material terms as well. Items no longer in use were offered to SWaCH collectors, either free or at very nominal rates. SWaCH collectors' homes started sporting handed-down refrigerators, coolers, washing machines, bicycles, and other utility items.

Municipal recognition of the thankless environmental work carried out by SWaCH collectors aided its endorsement by service users. SWaCH collectors were authorized, carried identity cards, and were in uniform. They were workers, and they had duties and rights. In the first iteration of SWaCH, municipal staff and officials insisted that there be no break in service provision. However, the municipal secondary collection system had a statutory weekly holiday, and the SWaCH collectors started taking one, too. The weekly day off is now established practice and is not questioned. Likewise, SWaCH workers also take public holidays and leave with prior intimation. They have to provide substitutes in the event of an extended leave period, at their cost, so that the service is not interrupted.

Sometime in the 1980s, a domestic workers union in Pune had agitated for, and secured, a month's extra salary as bonus, payable by employers during the Diwali festival. Waste pickers were quick to institute this established practice for themselves in the first year of operation of SWaCH. SWaCH collectors got their annual Diwali bonus from their service users, as well as the customary box of sweets and a new sari. Large housing colonies also have been known to cover health costs, provide interest-free loans to SWaCH collectors or to pay the college fees of their children.

It is during times of uncertainty that the strength of a relationship is tested. In 2017 over 200 houses were laid waste in a fire that swept through the Patil Estate slums, which housed a few hundred waste pickers. Everything they owned, including their documents, were consumed in the blaze. KKP KP put out personalized appeals, urging residents to reach out and help their SWaCH collector to rebuild her life. The response was overwhelming. Residents collectively contributed INR1.5 million in cash and much by way of building materials and household goods. One particular apartment block contributed to build an entire new home for their waste collector and even paid for the delivery of her pregnant daughter, who had come to their home for the birth of her first child.

The three years of the continuing pandemic have demonstrated residents' support for waste pickers in myriad ways. When all else locked down and the city was in disarray, SWaCH collectors clocked 97 per cent attendance, providing uninterrupted waste collection services. Their work kept the city clean and prevented the outbreak of other diseases. Their commitment and resolve in the face of adversity earned them the gratitude of residents, in cash and kind. Many SWaCH members themselves or their family members were infected by the predatory virus and had to be quarantined or hospitalized. SWaCH and KKP KP organized for dissemination of information and distribution of personal protective equipment and closely monitored members to ensure early identification, treatment and prevention.

The municipal government, however, did not match the generosity of the residents and did not approve the payment of a token of appreciation. The government relied on the work of public service employees who had stepped up during the pandemic. The SWaCH collectors were one such group that had delivered services at tremendous hardship

and risk to themselves, even though they were not paid employees of the PMC. The pandemic brought in the work-from-home culture and drove large numbers of city residents back to their homes in other parts of the country. User fees from tenanted premises decreased. Besides, the closure of non-essential businesses meant closure of shops, markets and scrap trade enterprises. There was also fear of contamination of waste. Residents of slums were in no position to pay the user fees because their informal work had been disrupted and they were unable to earn. All these factors contributed towards depressing the earnings of SWaCH collectors, who demanded that the PMC acknowledge their work during the pandemic by providing a one-time financial incentive of INR10 (USD0.12) per household for the most critical six-month period of the lockdowns. The municipal administration has not yet processed the demand, even while commending the SWaCH collectors.

Making claims towards economic actors in the recycling value chain

SWaCH V Collect Centres

The twenty-first century has heralded a consumer revolution where used goods and materials are discarded and rapidly replaced by fresh purchases in urban Maharashtra. SWaCH launched V Collect drives and campaigned to mop up such used goods and materials. Everything and anything that is discarded by households, shops and offices is collected, repaired, sorted, catalogued and sold. Some waste pickers purchase items from the SWaCH V Collect Centers (SVCC) in large quantities at wholesale rates and resell them in their communities. The PMC has provided two spaces for what are referred to as SVCCs. SWaCH+ has also rented warehouse space to accommodate the vast amounts of material that they garner. The SVCC was started in 2017 and, in the five years since, it has managed to generate INR6.1 million (approx. USD73,800) that has been earmarked for welfare benefits.

Kashtachi Kamai Scrap Stores and waste commodities markets

KKPKP has been operating Kashtachi Kamai (meaning fruit of labor) in space provided by the Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation since 1998. It is a fair-trade scrap store run on cooperative lines. Over the years it also has proved to be an effective market intervention, providing an inside view of the closely held scrap trade. Managed by the daughter of a KKPKP member, Kashtachi Kamai operates on terms that are different from existing scrap trade practices: accurate weights on electronic scales, daily itemized receipts for every transaction, fixed reduction of weights depending upon the source of the scrap and the season, daily cash payments, courteous treatment, participatory decision-making, fixed rate chart for different materials, transparency in accounting practices and annual cash bonus at variable rates, depending upon the revenue generated. Two more Kashtachi Kamai scrap stores operating on the same principles have been opened in Pune in the past five years.

Kashtachi Kamai above all serves as a demonstrable model of fair trade, enabling waste pickers to frame their demands from scrap traders across the city. Harassment from scrap traders has all but stopped, and cash bonuses have replaced token, in-kind festival bonuses. Shop owners arrange for and pay part of the costs of transporting the materials to their establishments. Instances of rogue scrap traders not settling the dues of waste pickers are non-existent, and some shops have started issuing receipts, following in the footsteps of Kashtachi Kamai.

Kashtachi Kamai stores have weathered the storms of the 2008 economic crash, the demonetization meltdown, as well as the cessation of the trade in the lockdowns during the pandemic. Scrap markets have shown themselves to be resilient even in the most adverse conditions. After all, they deal in commodities that follow the market principle of demand and supply, and the use of post-consumer materials in manufacturing makes economic sense because it reduces production costs. The biggest threat to the scrap trade is the attempt to bring in regulatory regimes, including Goods and Services Tax (GST)¹¹ under the guise of formalization of the trade, without providing any concessions to the business of scrap trading. The GST on waste plastic, for example, was raised from 5 per cent to 18 per cent, and that is going to be a serious disincentive overall for materials recycling. Alternatively, it will work to the detriment of labour by depressing rates of the materials and the earnings of collectors and other workers in the chain and favour co-generation or mechanization of material recovery processes. Further, the advantage of using scrap in place of virgin materials in manufacturing will be lost if the price of scrap materials increases on account of formalization without commensurate government concessions to compensate for the cost increases.

Explorations of Extended Producer Responsibility Frameworks to Increase Financing for Social Protection

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is meant to prevent the externalization of costs by producers and users of materials onto municipalities and to make producers and users of materials responsible for the entire life cycle of their products till recycling and disposal. Plastic has been the singular focus of EPR regulations in India, and the most recent guidelines on plastic packaging were issued by the union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change as recently as February 2022. They place obligations on the following four entities and prescribe annual targets for recycling, excluding end-of-life disposal:

1. Producer of plastic packaging.
2. Importer of all imported plastic packaging and/or plastic packaging of imported products.
3. Brand owners, including online platforms/marketplaces and supermarkets/retail chains other than those that are micro and small enterprises, as per the criteria of Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Government of India.
4. Plastic Waste Processors.

The guidelines grant the Central Pollution Control Board the powers to impose “environmental compensation” (refundable upon compliance of arrears within a period of three years) if the annual targets for recycling are not met.

¹¹ Fiscal powers between the Centre and the States are clearly demarcated in the Constitution with almost no overlap between the respective domains. The Centre has the powers to levy tax on the manufacture of goods (with some exceptions) while the States have the powers to levy tax on sale of goods. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) is a significant step in the field of indirect tax reforms in India. It amalgamates a large number of Central and State taxes into a single tax.

The most glaring omission in the Government of India's EPR guidelines of 2022¹² is the fact that it completely ignores the existing recycling economy, waste pickers, micro, small-and medium-trade enterprises whose livelihoods are dependent upon it. On the one hand, the Swachh Bharat Mission Plastic Waste Book credits the informal sector for India's high recycling rate (60 per cent), the union Ministry of Labour celebrates enterprise and entrepreneurs and, on the other hand, the EPR rules direct and encourage producers to set up parallel plastic waste collection systems by creating voluntary collection points, buy-back systems and materials recovery facilities.

EPR in fact provides a perfect opportunity for the government to recognize, regulate and strengthen the market-driven informal recycling economy in India. Instead, it encourages companies to set up parallel systems that ride roughshod over the informal recycling economy and may eventually decimate it under the pretext of environmental considerations.

An inclusive EPR framework and process would mandate waste picker representation in planning, decision-making and on oversight bodies to ensure that the informal sector is duly compensated (Anantakrishnan 2021). EPR funds could be deployed for mapping and registration of the informal sector actors, building their capacity, upgrading infrastructure, promoting technology transfer, and creating closed loop feedback and monitoring mechanisms. For easily recycled plastics like PET¹³, HDPE¹⁴, PP¹⁵ and LDPE¹⁶, EPR requirements could have been fulfilled through formalizing and documenting the work of the informal sector and adequately compensating its workers for their contribution. The cost of EPR should cover fair and statutory compensation towards labor for collecting, sorting, baling, storing and transporting waste. Without strong government regulation, mechanization might displace the millions of workers who have shouldered the burden of waste management for decades only so that companies can keep meeting their targets to continue producing plastic.

KKPKP engaged with the concept of EPR, even prior to the formation of the SWaCH Coop. The basis for the engagement was that materials, recyclable and non-recyclable, ended up in the waste stream for which the municipal body was responsible, while the manufacturers and the users of the materials profited from their sale and usage but bore no liability for their disposal. Waste pickers often were accused of collecting only what they wanted (materials that had value) and discarding the rest. In reality, they subsidize the collection costs of recyclable materials that meet the demand for raw materials in the manufacturing industry, as well as the waste handling costs of local governments by salvaging materials that are otherwise destined for landfills.

¹² Gazette of India: <https://egazette.nic.in/WriteReadData/2022/233568.pdf>

¹³ Polyethylene terephthalate: a type of plastic used especially to make bottles

¹⁴ HDPE is High Density Polyethylene, which is used for making non-corrosive industrial containers for storing chemicals like acids.

¹⁵ Polypropylene is used for making water pipes, the body of automobile batteries and toys.

¹⁶ LDPE is Low Density Polyethylene, used for making buckets, packing materials including carry bags, etc.

The first framework for EPR was spelled out in the Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016. They required companies to collect plastic waste, including post-consumer waste, within a period of six months and to phase out the production of MLP¹⁷. In 2018, an amendment to the rules allowed for the production of materials that were “energy recoverable” and could be put to alternate uses such as pyrolysis, waste to energy, co-processing in cement kilns and end of life incineration or burning. The amendment effectively took the edge off the search for more eco-friendly measures and products and encouraged burn technologies, with their potential for releasing toxins into the environment. Multi-layer packaging (MLP) is high in volume and low in weight and has no value even for energy recovery through burning, on account of which its recovery in existing waste collection systems is a challenge in the market-driven recycling chain.

The extensive presence of SWaCH collectors in primary waste collection supported by a large, decentralized, managerial field force has made it possible to incentivize SWaCH collectors to retrieve multi-layer packaging that is now ubiquitous as a packaging material.

KKPKP's first interaction with manufacturers was around 15 years ago, when the bonded packaging manufacturer, Tetrapak, gave a small grant to KKPKP for collecting post-consumer waste in the city. KKPKP was expected to collect and store it separately, volumes were low, and it was a stand-alone system that bypassed the existing chain of scrap traders that dealt with all materials. Tetrapak is used to package edible fluids and liquids, and the empty cartons attract rodents. Given these issues, Tetrapak found the per kg viability gap funding required to make the collection of these materials attractive for waste pickers prohibitively high. Hence the experiment was discontinued. ITC, a large conglomerate and manufacturer and user of MLP, also agreed to pay waste pickers a mutually agreed rate for collection of the MLP and to provide viability gap funding for its recycling. Like Tetrapak, this also meant setting up a parallel collection, sorting and baling system for a product that has low value in the market.

In the case of Expanded Polystyrene (EPS), a large manufacturer, KK Nag Pvt. Ltd., entered into a tripartite arrangement with SWaCH and the PMC. The EPS is collected from waste pickers and deposited at the PMC ramps, from where it is collected by the manufacturer. A total of 27.12 metric tons were collected between March 2021 and May 2022, for which the manufacturer paid KKPKP a total of INR271,250 (USD3,283) at the rate of INR10 (USD0.12) per kilogram.

Although such approaches can be beneficial for the collectors who earn an additional amount for the MLP, the system is not sustainable to scale, as they continue to sell other materials in the scrap market. Waste pickers expend double the effort and the logistics of transporting only some items. The total system cost is about INR18 per kg, of which INR4 is paid by the recycler, and the viability gap funding from the company is quite high at INR14 per kg. The collector is paid INR4 per kg (USD0.048).

Manufacturers spend billions on the product development and consumer feedback of sanitary pads and diapers. The same companies pay scant attention to their post-

¹⁷ MLP or multilayer packaging used in the packaging of food products is usually an aluminum sheet sandwiched between two layers of plastic but can be any material with one layer of plastic.

consumer disposal or to carry out research on the modes of disposal. Consumers are mostly households that discard the used products in the domestic waste system because the items are not termed as biomedical waste. Popular notions of purity and pollution among users notwithstanding, the items often are disposed unwrapped and in the open. The Red Dot campaign initiated by SWaCH was a move to focus attention on responsible disposal of sanitary waste by users and by the companies that profit from their increasing acceptance in the market. Drawing the attention of manufacturers to the problem was no easy task, especially since the products served up comfort and convenience to significant sections of the population. Neatly gift-wrapped boxes containing hundreds of used sanitary napkins and diapers were delivered to the offices of the manufacturers. The “send it back campaign,” as it was referred to in 2014, drew media attention that finally brought the issue into the public domain. There were several meetings locally and internationally with the manufacturers, after which Procter and Gamble (P&G), one of the largest companies, agreed to finance and replicate in Pune a recycling plant that it had run in Italy for some years. After much negotiation, P&G agreed to pay INR1 per kg (USD0.012) collected to SWaCH and entered into a formal agreement with the PMC in 2019 for establishing the recycling plant. During the period March 2021 to May 2022, a total of 670 metric tons of sanitary waste was delivered to the pilot plant. However, no amounts have been paid due to lack of verification of collection and delays in the commencement due to the pandemic.

Welfare Benefits Funded from Waste Pickers’ Collective Enterprises, Contributions and Services

SWaCH Coop Livelihood Fund

The by-laws of SWaCH require members to pay 5 per cent of their monthly user fee collection to the organization. When calculations became difficult and contentious, the members passed a resolution making it a fixed amount of INR200 (USD2.42) per month. The purpose of this livelihood fund was to set aside resources that could be used in times of need or to incubate new activities. Part of the amount collected was used to support operations during the lean period from 2013 to 2015, between the two cycles of SWaCH agreements with the PMC. The cumulative amount from 2017 to 2022 in the livelihood fund that can be used for welfare benefits is now INR24.7 million.

Credit Coop Welfare Fund

The Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Nagri Pat Sanstha (KKPNSPS, savings and credit cooperative of KKPCKP members) was established in 1998 to meet the savings and credit needs of waste pickers. Prior to the formation of the cooperative, waste pickers did not have access to formal institutional credit and paid usurious rates of interest to moneylenders and informal credit providers. The last two decades have witnessed a tremendous growth in credit markets, but whereas the availability of credit has increased, the competition has not pushed the interest rates southwards for workers in the informal economy. The operation of the KKPNSPS is similar to that of self-help groups, saving is compulsory, and lending is guaranteed by members of the cooperative. Apart from the credit aspect, the cooperative has the objective of providing members an institutional mechanism to build a fund that they can withdraw from when they can no longer work. The interest rate for loans compares favourably with that of other self-help groups and credit coops. Between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2022, a total of INR12.7

million (approx. USD153,000) accumulated in the welfare fund. Expenditure on welfare activities is presented in the table below.

Table 4: Utilization of Welfare Fund of the Credit Cooperative

| Year | Expenses on welfare activities | Amount (INR) | Amount (USD) |
|---------|--|------------------|----------------|
| 2015-16 | Notebooks for children's education | 91,230 | 1,101 |
| 2016-17 | Notebooks for children's education | 53,884 | 650 |
| 2018-19 | Emergency relief for members affected in Patil Estate fire | 1,250,000 | 15,084 |
| 2019-20 | Reserved for bad debts | 2,888,408 | 34,855 |
| 2020-21 | Emergency relief for members affected in Patil Estate fire | 15,000 | 181 |
| 2020-21 | Quarterly interest written off on all loans during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 | 1,663,453 | 20,073 |
| | Total expenses | 596,1975 | 71,944 |
| | Balance as on 31st March 2022 | 83,89,432 | 101,236 |

Discussion and Reflections

Waste pickers and their organizations in Pune have earned themselves a tremendous amount of goodwill over the past thirty years. During the first decade, their efforts were mainly geared towards shedding stereotypes and gaining official recognition for their work. In the second decade they became known to every household as a responsible service provider, known for their economic and environmental contributions. In the third decade they have come into their own, with Pune dwellers, local companies, business houses, politicians, private trusts, philanthropies and high net-worth individuals, stepping up to invest in and support waste pickers as residents of the city.

Waste Pickers' engagement underscores how organizational efforts to ensure greater inclusion in government schemes and programmes can be complemented by their own initiatives. The support extends beyond financial contributions, to speaking up on behalf of waste pickers and endorsing their demands. In addition, companies have also financially supported the use of collection equipment, portable sorting sheds, PPE, soap and sanitizers through their corporate social responsibility budgets. In 2021, when the renewal of the SWaCH agreement was uncertain, over 600,000 households of Pune and 115 out of 153 municipal councilors gave written endorsement of their service. The visibility, strength and credibility of the waste pickers and their enterprise have been established. The agreement was periodically extended for a period of two years.

The demand for secure, decent employment that ensures a good income supersedes any other demand in conversations with workers in the informal economy. It is no different for waste pickers, for whom secure access to recyclables and the freedom to trade them in the market is met through the institutional framework of SWaCH. That being the starting point, a decade down the line the monthly user fee for the waste collection service that they provide often outstrips their earnings from the sale of scrap. For most SWaCH workers, it is the user fee that is the main source of income, supplemented by the earnings from the sale of scrap.

The provision for social protection is a close second. Making space for the waste pickers – the bottom of the pyramid workers in the recycling value chain – in the solid waste management system of the city was a strategic move on the part of the KKP KP. This became possible because the organization was able to amplify waste pickers' voices and to use research and field-based insights to construct an occupation that had utility and economic value, and for workers to advocate a different way of doing things. The approach from the beginning was one of persuasion and negotiation, articulating a twenty-first century vision of sustainable urban solid waste management that was worker-centric and inclusive.

It is this joining of dots, the making of connections, of using evidence and rational arguments, of engaging with and appealing to peoples' better senses that wove a web in which each segment that derived benefit from the work of waste pickers also became part of the social protection network. They were the people and the institutions to whom the claims were made, and not just the government.

Explorations of a worker-centric social protection framework

KKP KP is a trade union, the KKP NPS is a savings-linked credit cooperative, and SWaCH and SWaCH+ are social and solidarity economy enterprises (SSE). The workers as owners of their own enterprise are not in an employment relationship with these entities. What they do have is a claim on the revenue generated from economic activities of these entities, portions of which can be channeled, via internal resolutions, into social protection schemes for members.

The role of the municipalities and service users

SWaCH collectors do not have employment relationships with the PMC because they are not hired or contracted, paid wage workers. They are member-owners of the autonomous workers cooperative that was established pursuant to a resolution of the PMC general body with the twin purposes of carrying out the work of door-to-door waste collection and that of poverty alleviation among waste pickers and other urban poor. It is for this reason that primary waste collection is not tendered out in Pune. What SWaCH brings to the table are several thousand waste collectors skilled in handling recyclable materials, who know the value of maintaining segregated waste streams, are able to meet service level benchmarks and are able to recover user fees from service recipients. What the PMC gets is a low-cost, reliable, efficient, accountable primary waste collection system and the credit for its inclusive approach. Since SWaCH is an outcome of a PMC resolution, the MoU between the PMC and the SWaCH Cooperative sets out the financial and non-financial terms and conditions of the engagement and the roles and responsibilities of the two parties. The MoU is time bound and subject to a renewal process every five years, and the perpetual uncertainty is a threat to the model. The renewal process is fraught with risks as various political and economic interests of the policymakers, administrators and the powerful contractor lobbies come into play. Although the service users pay for the collection service, making the model sustainable, there is immense value to the legitimacy and the financial support that SWaCH draws from the PMC. The fact that SWaCH collectors operate with the permission of and under the aegis of the PMC is reassuring to the service users.

Going forward, further iterations of SWaCH could include automatic renewal of the MoU on the grounds that SWaCH provides self-employment opportunities in municipal service provision to the most marginalized sections of society through their own Social and Solidarity Economy Enterprises. It is conceivable that the PMC, as enabler, could provide direct assured annual grants towards key worker welfare benefits, including paid leave and payment to those who work as substitutes during that period; paid maternity leave; life, disability and medical insurance cover; and contribution to a government pension fund. In actual fact, in this model the SWaCH collector subsidizes the solid waste management costs because the PMC does not pay her wages. The least that they can do is to pay for the worker benefits and the costs of the management structure, collection equipment and safety gear and other support required to run the enterprise.

Given the vast numbers of waste generators, constructing an employment relationship with service users independent of the PMC would make it a logistical nightmare. One option could be for the PMC to resolve to incorporate earmarked annual cess for a social protection fund for waste pickers, payable by residents as part of their property tax.

The role of scrap traders

Waste pickers transact with the scrap traders to whom they sell their recyclable materials by weight or by piece. The sale-purchase transaction of commodities does not constitute an employment relationship. Waste pickers are free to and do sell to different traders, although they typically transact with the same traders for long periods of time. There are no records of the transactions, which are in cash. It is the municipal government that issues licenses under the Shops and Establishments Act to the scrap traders to operate shops. Insistence on the recording of weights of the transactions would be a start and would give an idea of the quantities of recyclable materials collected and traded, allowing for a structured demand of a portion of the revenue from the scrap trade towards welfare benefits for waste pickers.

The potential of Extended Producer Responsibility

The origin of post-consumer recyclable materials collected by waste pickers are manufacturing and packaging companies that produce goods for the market, while they bear no responsibility for managing post-consumer waste. That responsibility falls to the waste pickers and the municipal government. Waste pickers underwrite the actual costs of collection, transport and pre-processing of post-consumer recyclable materials. That's what makes recycling possible or even viable. The true cost of recycling is far higher and needs to be systematically computed for each material.

A study that considers the actual costs of collection, handling, transport, and recycling, considering statutory labor standards and environmental compliance requirements, would reveal the actual per-kilogram costs of the work carried out by waste pickers. The appropriate per-kilogram rate for each material could then be levied as environmental and social protection cess by the state government. Manufacturers are already subject to GST, but it can be argued that the companies need to pay an environmental cess for adding to the waste burden – while also compensating those who fulfill their EPR obligations by collecting and recycling the waste corporations generate.

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