

Power of Community

Waste Management in Plotted Colonies



A fetid wind chokes Gurgaon every year with a stench that rises from the Bandhwari landfill 15 km from the city. Created to absorb the 2,000 metric tonnes (MT) of waste generated here and in neighbouring Faridabad, Bandhwari is described as “hell” by people who live in its vicinity. But it is a tragic inevitability, as Mukesh Yadav, former Ward Manager of Gurugram’s Ward 32 attests. He’s also adamant that “we cannot create another Bandhwari. Gurugram’s wet waste has got to be composted”.

Yadav is well placed to expound on the subject. As the head of Sushant Lok’s decentralised wet waste processing unit, he’s one of thousands of citizens in Ward 32 inspired by the Alag Karo project to recognise sustainable waste management as the city’s last chance to slow down the alarming pace at which its air, land and

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Credits: Saahas

Door to Door Awareness in Horizontal Colony





Credits: Saahas

Handing Over of Segregated Waste by Households

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“Sustainable waste management demands the engagement of communities, commitment of RWAs, volunteers and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), and infrastructure for collection, transportation and wet waste processing,” explains Sonia Garga, Project Head in Saahas. While the project has witnessed thumping successes, it has also faced repeated hurdles in the components Garga sites as critical. The biggest challenges, some of them ongoing, arose in the ward’s four horizontal colonies -- Sun City, South City, Sushant Lok and Sector 45, which house a combination of bulk waste generating groups of homes, commercial establishments, local markets, and even villages.

Ward 32 is an assortment of condominiums, commercial establishments and horizontal colonies. Implementation in the first two categories, while not without its impediments, was relatively smooth since they’re led by cohesive Residents Welfare Associations (RWAs) that generate funds or comply with strict industrial norms. A key difference between condos and horizontal colonies is that RWAs in the former exert greater control over policy formulation and implementation. The residents pay the RWA a monthly maintenance fee and generally demonstrate greater cohesion in their collective community goals. In horizontal colonies, on

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the other hand, residents own and maintain individual plots. Membership to the RWA and maintenance fees are optional, because of which RWAs exercise limited control. They're required by laws pertaining to Bulk Waste Generators (BWGs) to process their wet waste onsite but many are crippled by a dearth of funds and internal disagreements. The sense of community is lower because horizontals tend to be more scattered, dispersed and less structured. "It's like fighting a battle without an army to back you up," Garga explains.

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Waste collection is contracted either to Ecogreen, the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram's (MCG) authorised concessionaire, or private vendors who hire migrant labourers to collect waste, sell the recyclables and leave the rest to be transported from local dumpsites to the landfill by the MCG. With processing costs thus covered by the MCG, there was only profit and political clout to be reaped



Credits: Saahas

Street View of Independent Plotted Colony in Ward 32



Credits: Saahas

Top View of Segregated Waste Collection in a Partitioned Vehicle

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from the endeavour. Waste collection contracts are so highly prized that in Sushant Lok, a bitter rivalry continues to rage between Ecogreen and the private vendor who upstaged them shortly after the intervention began. This was a setback for the project, which had already worked on training Ecogreen’s waste workers and partitioning their vehicles to avoid mixing the waste the residents segregated. In addition, the high turnover of waste workers within agencies, and changes of agencies themselves, frequently resulted in the project’s duplication of effort and resources. Intervention by committed high-level officials who prioritise sustainable waste management is the only way forward in this regard.

The waste workers lived in squalid conditions on monthly earnings ranging between INR 10,000–15,000 even as the agencies that employed them raked in profits. With the waste they handle now segregated, their work has reduced, working conditions improved, incomes increased from the higher volume of uncontaminated recyclables they can sell, and frequency of injuries lessened. In Sun City, the waste workers have been trained on using an IT tool being piloted to further transparency and efficiency at every level of waste management.

Waste processing in the four colonies has improved significantly as well. In Sun City, whose RWA sought an end-to-end waste management solution, construction is underway on Gurgaon’s first distributed biogas model. Partly subsidised by the project, it will process 500 kg of wet waste generated by the colony’s 2,000 households every day. In Sushant Lok, where the agency Yadav works for, collects about 3.5MT of dry waste, the unit he manages processes about 2MT of wet waste every day, turning it into compost that is distributed free of cost to RWAs and residents. The hurdles notwithstanding, his city would be able to potentially take steps to mitigate the growth of Bandhwari.