

Transforming Lives

Effect of Source Segregation on Shah Alam



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Three years ago, Shah Alam followed his brother-in-law, a waste collector, from a warehouse in Assam where he worked as a coolie to the greener pastures of Gurugram. Here, the father of four, all of who ply the same trade, starts his day at 6.30 am to be able to collect waste from over 200 households in Sun City.

Until recently, Shah Alam went on his rounds in a *thela* – a modified tricycle with mixed waste – collecting waste in a single gunny bag. The wet waste was particularly hard to lug across the city. His limbs burned from the exertion of pedalling with over 70–80 kg of waste by about 9.30 am. As the morning wore on, his load increased and his efforts became more strenuous. He'd put his dry waste in the front of the *thela* and the wet at the back but since the latter was much heavier, staying balanced was often a losing battle. His *thela* flipped over more times than he can recall, injuring him and causing him financial losses. Shah Alam wasn't alone in this drudgery. For the six waste collectors who carted away Sun City's daily output of 450 kg of waste, every day at work was fraught with hazards.



Credits: Saahas

Shah Alam with his Collection Motorbike



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Collection of Segregated Waste by Shah Alam, the Waste Worker

Everything changed after the residents of Sun City were trained to segregate their waste and the waste collectors trained and equipped to manage it. "People began segregating about two months ago. The Alag Karo project trained the residents on segregating waste and us on collecting segregated waste," Shah Alam says. The benefits to him surpassed any expectations he had, going in. "Our work has become so much easier. Before there used to be broken glass and used syringes mixed in with the waste. We'd get hurt a lot. Now the wet waste is composted. We do secondary sorting of the dry waste to collect the recyclable plastic, glass and juice packs and give it to our contractor *thekedar*," he says.

In addition to their work having become faster and more hygienic, Shah Alam and the other waste workers who operate in the area are also earning more now that the quantity and quality of recyclables are better. Their living conditions and wellness have improved as they no longer have rotting organic matter attracting vermin to their doorsteps.

A striking outcome of the positive change is that Shah Alam has been able to replace his old *thela* with a motorbike he's been able to finance with his increased earnings. The weight of the bike prevents it from toppling over when it's loaded. Getting around has become even faster and easier. The acquisition has become aspirational for the other waste collectors. They all agree that one change in public behaviour – from mixing to segregating waste – has had a far-reaching impact on their health, earnings, and the dignity of their livelihoods.