

Driving Accountability Through User Fees: Solid Waste Management in Kolar District

An effective way to ensure accountability for essential tasks is by attaching a cost to them. For instance, a gym membership fee can motivate individuals to attend the gym regularly, just as a user fee can incentivize residents to dispose of their waste properly. A user fee, by definition, is the cost required to access a product or a service. This concept is not new and has been implemented worldwide across different domains. In India, residents are charged a user fee for accessing solid waste collection services. This system helps reduce illegal dumping and supports the effective implementation of solid waste management practices. In addition, a user fee fosters a sense of ownership over waste management and enables financial sustainability for SWM operations. The following case study highlights the successful implementation of user fee in the Kolar district of Karnataka.

AshaKirana project beginnings

In order to ensure the operational efficiency of SWM in the Kolar district, Saahas with the support of Juniper Network launched the AshaKirana project. This project which began in 2017 in Orohalli Grama panchayat, Hoskote Taluk, expanded its scope in 2021 to include more initiatives and has been operating in the Kolar district successfully since 2023 across 30 Gram Panchayats.

The region's SWM system primarily focuses on dry waste collection. Some of the key objectives of the project include implementing SWM through a revenue model managed by Self Help Group (SHGs) while increasing the income of 90 women involved in the process. It focuses on empowering women through skill enhancement and sustainable income opportunities. Collaboration with panchayats ensures an effective door-to-door waste collection and proper processing. Training on reuse and reduction principles is provided, alongside livelihood initiatives like soap and cloth-making and eco-friendly efforts such as cutlery banks.

The successful implementation of SWM processes can be attributed to several effective initiatives undertaken by the Saahas team in the region, one such initiative being the implementation of user fee collection.

The Significance of User-Fee

User fee plays a crucial role in SWM at the Gram Panchayat level, as they help sustain the funding needed for SWM activities. This fee is typically allocated to cover the operational and maintenance expenses associated with SWM. It is generally imposed by the local body on the waste generator to cover the full or partial cost of providing solid waste collection, transportation, processing, and disposal services in accordance with the by-laws of the state.

The Panchayat Development Officer (PDO) and the GP members initiated user fee collection along with the SHG members in Kolar.



In Kolar district, 14 GPs passed a user fee resolution by calling all the local bodies and the relevant stakeholders at the GP meeting. An average uniform fee was established based on factors like the type and quantity of waste generated, frequency of collection, and any additional services provided. A collective decision was taken to charge waste generators 30 rupees per household and 50 rupees per shop which was also the fee implemented and followed in other GPs. This resolution resulted in an authorization for the GPs to collect user fees from residents. The user fee is collected by the Gram Panchayat or SHGs in person and is preferably collected in the first week of each month. This is then deposited in the GPLF (Grama Panchayat Level Federation account. At times, if the residents deny to handover

The total user fee collected across the 30 GPs from January 2024 to March 2025 is Rs 3,21,331. The user fee amount and sale value of waste is documented in the log and O&M book by SHGs.

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The fee structure and payment procedures are communicated to all the users of SWM services. Information on the purpose of the fees, how it is calculated, and the time within which the payments need to be made are explained in detail. Various communication channels are used such as notices, websites, and community meetings to reach users.

A billing and invoicing system is implemented to generate bills for users based on their usage of SWM services. This is to ensure that the bills are accurate, easy to understand, and includes clear instructions on how to make payments. Support services are offered by the GP to assist users with any questions or issues related to the fee payments. This could include a dedicated helpline, online chat support or FAQs

Systems are implemented to track fee payments in real-time. This helps in ensuring timely collection and allows for prompt action in cases of non-payment or discrepancies.

Users are educated about the importance of paying SWM fees to sustain and improve waste management. Waste generators are also informed about the benefits of proper waste disposal and recycling practices and how user fees contribute to

funding these initiatives. Flipcharts are given to SHGs for door-to-door awareness and to enhance their own knowledge.



The fee collection process is continuously evaluated to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments based on user feedback and evolving business needs.

Empowering Self-Help Groups

The Self-Help Groups (SHGs) form an integral part of the SWM value chain process in the Kolar district. There are 69 SHG women in 30 GPs, each grama panchayat consisting of 2 staff. They are primarily responsible for collecting waste as well as maintaining a record of the quantity of waste collected. The SHG along with the PDO (Panchayat Development Officer) are taken for exposure visits and workshops where they undergo intensive training on SWM practices.

Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) are signed between the SHGs and the GPs outlining the implementation of the SWM process, including details regarding remuneration. Rules about how and where the waste is collected as well as which routes will be followed within the GP to collect waste are included in the agreement.

Workshops on capacity building are conducted for both SHGs and local bodies to carry out waste collection effectively. Most times these trainings take place in the presence of an SBM consultant, APO (Assistant Project Officer), DS (Deputy Secretary), and the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of the Zila Panchayat. The workshop that was recently conducted on 8th July 2024 covered important aspects such as significance of operating O&M books, following a set waste collection schedule and the importance of using Personal Protective Equipment. These workshops prove extremely important for the effective implementation of SWM.

SHGs typically receive a minimum salary of ₹5,000 to ₹6,000 per month from funds allocated under the 15th Finance Commission budget. During the planning phase for Kolar district, insufficient funds were designated for solid waste management (SWM) processes and related activities. Often, money is earmarked solely for drainage cleaning, neglecting the costs associated with managing solid waste. It was only during implementation that the shortfall in SWM funding became apparent. The Saahas team believes that if the Gram Panchayats effectively manage SWM, they will require fewer funds for drainage cleaning. Some Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) resist allocating funds for SWM due to the misconception that simply cleaning black spots and drainage is sufficient for the district's needs. If and when the GPs run out of funds, they then use the user fee revenue collected to assist SHGs with vehicle fuel costs and SWM activities. Additionally, Saahas has provided gap funding for 6 GP's in the district to support the remuneration of SHGs such that 3k is contributed for each member.

Barriers to Overcome

- Some residents still continue to refuse to give user fees due to a lack of awareness and understanding of the significance of the right kind of waste disposal. In some GPs, there is an irregularity seen in paying remuneration and in providing money for fuel charges. At times, the SHGs do not receive their remuneration for over 6 months. The lack of consistent funding deters SHGs from regularly using their collection vehicles to collect waste. This amounts to resistance from residents while paying user fees because of irregular waste collection. Their trust is shaken and hence at times, user fee collection becomes a hassle.

Key Takeaways & Path forward

Analysis of the field data over a 15-month period showed that, on an average, only about 7% of households that handed over segregated waste paid the user fee. Although this is a relatively low percentage, it's important to note that the Asha Kirana project follows a scale-up, low-touch model with minimal direct/deep intervention.

This small yet positive improvement in user fee collection can be largely attributed to the ongoing dedication and support from the Saahas team, as well as the continuous backing from the Gram Panchayats. The team routinely follows up with the SHGs to ensure they are consistently collecting user fees and tracking the amounts received. Additionally, both the Zilla Panchayat and the Gram Panchayat exert pressure on the SHGs to collect these fees from residents, which helps fund solid waste management expenses, including remuneration

The GPs have also shown support to the SHGs by providing essential equipment such as 24 weighing machines. The team has equipped most Gram Panchayats with ongoing awareness and knowledge, along with valuable resources like operation and maintenance books, flipcharts, weighing machines for six GPs, flyers, and stickers.

Some residents are reluctant to pay user fees, while others contribute out of habit, regardless of the amount. Saahas has been encouraging the collection of user fees, no matter how small, to help residents develop this practice. Although the fees collected are often minimal, they are still gathered to maintain the habit. Over time, these small contributions can accumulate into a more substantial sum.

A reliable indicator of the value people place on solid waste management (SWM) is their continuous willingness to pay for it. Kolar district exemplifies how a minimal user fee, active involvement from the Saahas team, and support from the Gram Panchayats has created a model of change. Though progress may appear incremental, the collective and ongoing commitment of all stakeholders is generating meaningful momentum. This growing success offers hope and inspiration for other Gram Panchayats to follow suit and embrace this essential initiative.

