A start toward a zero-waste market: Best practices in solid waste management from Bagalur

To promote responsible waste disposal habits by fostering behavioural change through sustained awareness, the project Parivarthaneya Hejje was started in rural Bengaluru. The project is funded by Shell India Markets Pvt Ltd and is run by Saahas. It started in November 2022 to implement solid waste management practices in Marenahalli Gram Panchayat (GP), Yelahanka Taluk, Bengaluru. In July 2023, to further this engagement, an amendment to the existing collaboration agreement was made to increase the project's scope. Bagalur and Bandikodigehalli (BK Halli) GPs were added to the scope.
This project brings under its umbrella households as well as public places like market zones. Consistent efforts to strengthen solid waste management in the GPs have enabled one of the markets in the Bagalur area to adopt best practices.

Understanding the Scale of the Problem

A Tuesday in Bagaluru speaks for itself amidst the controlled chaos of its farmers' market. With about 268 vendors selling vegetables and fruits, the market hustles with a large footfall of visitors all day long, and by the time the last vendor packs up, the ground tells an entirely different story. With vegetable trimmings piling up, rotten fruits discarded, and plastic bags left unattended, a single open pit in the market kept brimming with legacy waste for years. A problem with the market hygiene and waste-handling systems at the Bagalur farmers' market prompted the need for a thorough baseline assessment.

A 13-day waste audit revealed that the market produced about 127 kg/day of waste on regular days from the 9 permanent shops, whereas the waste generation increased to about 1300 kg/day from the 268 temporary shops operating on Tuesdays. The majority, 97% of the waste, consisted of organic matter (vegetable and fruit waste), while the remaining 3% accounted for the dry waste (single-use plastics (SUPs) like plastic bags, paper packaging, foils, and tins). Due to the huge amount of waste, the team had initially explored local goshalas to divert the wet waste to. The closest one was about 6 km away. However, they asked for a minimum of 1000 kg of waste for free pickup.

While the surge in the quantity of waste was huge on Tuesdays, what was more concerning was the fate of this waste. Neither segregation systems nor collection points existed; the only destination of the mixed waste was the single open pit in the market. With irregular collection, the pit kept overflowing with legacy waste, and the neglected corners of the market showcased the utter absence of a proper waste management system in Bagalur. In brief, all the waste generated ultimately ended up in the landfill.

Fig. 1: The common pit in the market before clean-up

What was even more striking was the fact that many vendors were aware that their wet waste could be used as cattle feed or composted. Somewhere in fragments, the knowledge existed, but what was lacking was a waste management structure. A system with supervision and shared infrastructure was what the Bagalur market needed the most to translate the knowledge into behavioural adaptation.

Establishing transformation – one step at a time

Since the start of the project, the team of Saahas has worked to bring about the much-needed change in SWM in the Bagalur GP. An integral part of this task was door-to-door awareness to strengthen behavioural change in the community. With IEC activities reaching out to all the members of the GP, special SWM campaigns at the market, workshops building the capacity of sanitation staff, and clearance of 282 black spots in the Bagalur GP, the public had started to gain on the importance of SWM. Considering the lack of proper waste management in the market, the team decided to channel the awareness of the vendors and customers of the market into transformative action.

The transformation was launched with CleanUp Day 2025, conducted by Saahas through a market-wide vendor-to-vendor (V2V) awareness drive. Focusing beyond the boundaries of cleanup, this drive was an attempt to shift the culture of waste management in Bagalur. The intervention delivered the key message on the importance of waste segregation and diversion of wet waste for productive use, such as cattle feed, and for composting. The collection of segregated waste in sacks kept at designated spots yielded early results on the market's cleanliness. Another immediate intervention was to address the legacy waste in the common pit in the market area. Concerted efforts spread over 2-3 days helped in the complete cleanup of this waste. What followed next was a measure to cease access to this pit for unauthorised dumping, and to achieve the same, the pit was covered securely with an impermeable tarpaulin sheet, discouraging any further mixed waste disposal. Cleansed of waste and beautifully painted, the pit was the most visible transformation of the Bagalur market. With people noticing the change, the likelihood of protecting it increased, and it vividly reflected in the segregation practices adopted by the vendors.

Fig. 2: Transformation of the pit in the market

Building Behavioural Change

What started as an intervention to get shopkeepers to segregate their waste actually led to waste reduction. The vendors began taking their own segregated wet waste for cattle feed, and whatever was left was collected by local farmers and residents for feeding their livestock. Due to this, the quantum of Tuesday market waste was reduced from 1300 kg/day to 300 kg/day. Nearly 70% of the wet waste in the market was taken for cattle feed, and the remaining 30% was diverted to the Bagalur SWM composting facility. With the reduction of wet waste quantity, it was no longer required to send the waste to the goshalas. A very minimal quantity of dry waste was collected separately and sent to the DWCC. Thus, a simple practice of segregating waste at source led to visual cleanliness, resource recovery, and collective accountability.

More than a single clean-up drive, the intervention aimed at a sustained transformation driven by shared responsibilities of GP staff, SHGs, sanitation workers, vendors, local community members, and school and college students. The Saahas team ensured that some form of awareness drive took place in the market every week for the entire duration of July-March FY ’25-’26, and these campaigns were a combined effort of the project team as well as SHGs, GP staff, and sanitation workers on a rotational basis. Even students from local educational institutions helped with the awareness drive as volunteers. These sessions of street mobilisation, display board installation, notice to vendors on the SUP ban, wall painting, and announcements reinforced best practices in waste management,

including the ban on SUPs, proper segregation, collective ownership, and the need to divert waste from landfills. What strengthened these practices was the regular on-the-ground supervision and continuous follow-up, which helped embed the best practices in the communities. The secretary from the GP visited the market on Tuesdays along with the Saahas team to monitor the progress. The contractor allocated for the management of the cleanliness of the market and the collection of user fees was also involved in the awareness drives.

Challenges and gradual changes

With systems gaining traction and behaviour getting imbibed, the Bagalur market showcased a magnificent improvement in waste handling practices, but it still struggles with certain challenges. Despite repeated campaigns and notices to reduce SUPs, like plastic bags and plastic packets for display, the usage of SUPs did not reduce beyond a certain threshold. Display boards and wall paintings were used to communicate the message of SUP reduction. 60% of the vendors in the market raised awareness among regular customers about the use of cloth bags. The project team had also distributed cloth bags to the vendors as an example to start using sustainable alternatives. While these vendors understood the problem of plastic bags and packaging, what they did not have access to was the availability of suitable alternatives. There was a visible reduction in the usage of plastic bags for pre-packaging and the display of fruits and vegetables, but the lack of affordable alternatives locally proved to be the reason for slow progress on the SUP ban.

In the words of the vendors of the market,
"There is visible cleanliness of the market with no odour issue. The vendors themselves are keeping segregated waste and taking the wet waste for cattle feed."

“After the intervention of Saahas and the awareness activities conducted, the vendors and the customers have reduced the use of plastic bags. Customers have started using cloth bags to buy fruits and vegetables.”

Fig. 3: Wall painting to spread awareness about SWM

In response to this challenge of SUP reduction, SHGs were approached to participate in textile upcycling workshops. Training women with basic tailoring skills to create reusable cloth bags was an approach to explore the possibilities of manufacturing sustainable alternatives locally. An early-stage initiative, this system could drive a long-term vision of a circular economy model along with livelihood opportunities for women.

Fig. 4: Textile upcycling workshop for SHGs

What unfolded as chaotic waste mismanagement is now groomed into a structured waste-handling system. Operating in a rural setting, with the keen involvement of the GP, continuous monitoring and supervision, and communities taking ownership, the Bagalur farmers' market story is deeply instructive. Cleaning the market pit and surrounding areas created more space to accommodate a larger number of vendors. The outcome was an increase in the number of vendors from 268 to 289 in 9 months. With improvements in visual cleanliness and adoption of segregation practices, the Bagalur story is a reminder that clean markets attract more business.

This story of the market transformation inspires replicability, demonstrating how success can be achieved with no capex, sustained community involvement, behavioural change and individual ownership. With practical measures including waste audits, structured awareness drives on source segregation, designated collection spots, and regular supervision, these easy-to-adopt practices serve as more ideas to replicate the model. Leveraging the existing local resource recovery networks, such as farmers and livestock owners who can directly utilise clean organic waste, thereby reducing the burden on collection systems, was a key strength of this market transformation.

Already leaning towards a zero-waste model, this market still has scope for improvement, like the reduction in SUP and profitable SHG initiatives. Overall, the Bagalur market demonstrates that waste management is not simply a matter of knowledge but more of translating the learnings into on-ground practices.