

Case Study: Kasa Muktha Bellandur

The power of one: Role of community champions in social development projects

Gaining genuine community ownership stands as one of the toughest and most important goals for any civil society organisation working on social projects. When communities actively participate and feel invested in a project, lasting impact becomes possible. CSOs achieve meaningful change only when they build trust, listen closely to local voices, and create space for shared decision-making and responsibility. Reaching this milestone is never easy, but when communities truly own the process, they drive the project's success and ensure its relevance and longevity.

Context

Bellandur, ward number 150, is one of the city's largest wards, spanning 26.4 square kilometres, and joined the BBMP in 2007. The ward was once a village panchayat before it was taken over by the urban expansion. As the number of IT parks on the outskirts of the city increased, the ward's development got underway. 22,368 homes and businesses were listed in the area in the 2011 Census, however current approximations indicate that this number has surpassed 100,000. There are also a lot of open layouts in the ward, many of which are found in housing complexes with low to medium incomes. Unfortunately, waste collection in most of these colonies is highly irregular, leading to the presence of numerous dumpsites, some of which are consistently set on fire. The ward does have a Dry Waste Collection Centre but because of poor source segregation levels, the very poor-quality waste lands there, making the operations unviable.

To address these challenges, Saahas, with support of Societe General, launched Kasa Muktha Bellandur in 2024 . The objective of this intervention is to improve source segregation levels through awareness and improved monitoring, training the collection staff in handling segregated waste and streamlining collection, home composting and waste reduction through promotion of sustainable alternatives to single-use items.

Challenges

During the initial phase of the project, the team faced several challenges, the most significant being gaining the trust of residents. Waste collection in Bellandur was highly irregular, with vehicles operating without a fixed route or schedule. This random collection pattern caused inconvenience to residents and led to growing frustration within the

community. As a result, many people began opposing awareness programmes, often questioning the purpose of segregation when waste was not collected daily. During GVP (garbage vulnerable points) beautification efforts residents often remarked, “This won’t last; we will start dumping here or somewhere again,” reflecting deep mistrust in the system

In addition to these challenges, several operational difficulties further slowed the progress. The team struggled to obtain permission for wall paintings that were planned to spread awareness. Space constraints at the small project office made it difficult to store the bins meant for distribution. Moreover, one of the Multi-Dwelling Units (MDUs) that had initially agreed to install a lane composter withdrew their support at the last minute. These setbacks collectively highlighted the need for stronger community collaboration and local leadership to move the project forward.

Role of the Community Champion - Overcoming Challenges

Babu Reddy, a lifelong resident of Bellandur, is a highly respected and influential figure in the community. His family has been well-known in the area for generations, earning the trust of people since his grandfather’s time. Growing up in Bellandur, Babu Reddy developed a strong sense of care for his community, always ready to lend a helping hand. His approachable nature and willingness to help others have made him a go-to person for the community. Guided by a deep desire to serve, one of his dreams is to adopt a village that lacks basic facilities such as electricity and water, and work towards improving the living conditions there.

At a time when the project was struggling to gain momentum, the involvement of Babu Reddy became a turning point. After observing the consistent efforts of the Saahas team, he became an active supporter of the initiative. His leadership and local influence played a crucial role in bridging the gap between the team and the residents.

One of the first collaborative events held with his support was a rangoli competition organized in the Bellandur Post Office area on 28th August 2024. The aim of the event was to bring residents together and spread awareness about waste segregation in a fun and engaging way. Babu Reddy personally went door-to-door inviting residents to participate and with due respect to him 35 participants (~10% of the community) showed up, of which 82% were women. He also decided that every participant should receive a prize, generously gifting each one a Milton hot box from his personal expense. His enthusiasm and inclusive approach helped build goodwill and strengthened community participation.

Beyond events also, his contributions were both practical and impactful. He offered space within his own building to install a lane composter, setting an example for others to follow. He also used his influence to help the team secure permissions for wall paintings that were previously delayed. Throughout the project, he made it a point to participate in nearly every

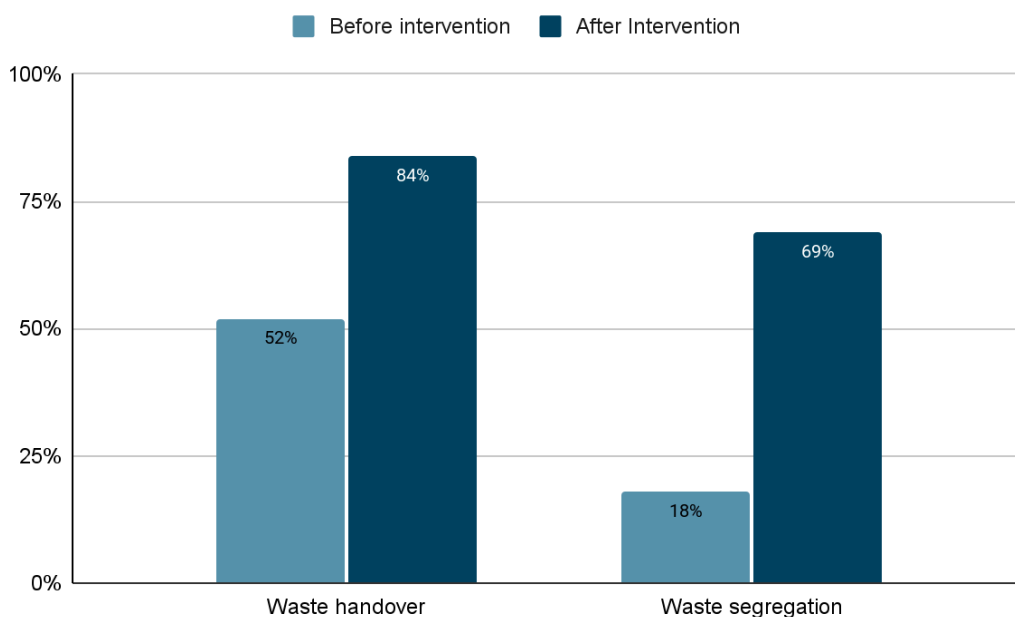
event organized by the team, lending credibility and visibility to the initiative. During the beautification of Garbage Vulnerable Point (GVPs), he personally visited the site, spoke to residents about the importance of keeping the area clean, and asked individuals to monitor the spot and prevent further dumping.

Because of his consistent efforts and unwavering support, a strong rapport has now developed between Saahas and the residents of Bellandur. People who were once hesitant or distrustful now actively engage with the team and participate in activities. Babu Reddy's leadership demonstrated how genuine community involvement, guided by empathy and action, can turn challenges into lasting collaboration and collective progress.



Impact

Saahas implemented its waste management year 2 intervention across 9 blocks in Bellandur, with each block served by one collection vehicle. In Block 2, the involvement of community leader Babu Reddy significantly strengthened resident participation and engagement with the program.



Before the intervention, only 52% of households in Block 2 handed over their waste, and 18% practiced segregation. After Babu Reddy began mobilising residents and facilitating community events in support of the Saahas team, waste handover increased to 84%, and segregation improved to 69%. His leadership built trust and encouraged households to actively adopt proper waste management practices.

The strong community engagement in Block 2 created a ripple effect in neighbouring blocks, where residents, inspired by the visible changes, requested similar activities. As a result, several neighbouring blocks also reported steady improvement in waste collection efficiency and segregation levels.

This clearly demonstrates how community-led mobilisation can accelerate behavioural change and drive voluntary expansion of the initiative beyond the primary intervention area.

Learnings

This case study highlights how local leadership can be the cornerstone of successful community-based waste management initiatives. The experience in Bellandur demonstrated that building trust is just as important as building systems. Residents are more likely to engage and adopt sustainable practices when the message comes from someone they know, respect, and identify with.

Community leadership plays a key role in building trust, ownership, and accountability within local initiatives. When a respected and influential individual supports a project, residents are more willing to listen, participate, and change their behaviour. In waste management, technical solutions alone are not enough, success depends on community involvement and collective action. Community leaders act as a bridge between NGOs and residents, helping overcome resistance, mobilize participation, and ensure the initiative is embraced and sustained over time.

This approach can be easily scaled to other areas because it depends on people, not heavy resources. Every community has influential individuals who can motivate others to act. By identifying such leaders early and guiding them, projects can build trust faster and reach more people. When change is led by someone the community already respects, it spreads naturally and lasts longer. This makes the model practical and effective for expanding similar projects in other places.

Testimonial - Babu Reddy, Community Leader, Bellandur

“As a community leader, I used to receive frequent complaints, residents were unhappy with irregular waste collection, and the collection staff faced challenges due to poor segregation. When the Saahas team began working here with genuine dedication, I saw that their

approach could bring real change. Today, segregation has improved, complaints have reduced, and I feel proud to see my community moving in a positive direction.

To eliminate garbage dumping points, I had earlier installed CCTVs, but they were not effective. The Saahas team then beautified these spots with wall paintings and decorations, which successfully discouraged dumping. In MDUs, where tenant turnover is high, I am advising owners to include segregation clauses in rental agreements with penalties for non-compliance, and a few have begun doing so. However, to build on this progress, we need BBMP to increase the number of collection vehicles, as the population has grown but the number of vehicles has stayed the same for many years.

I assure you that I will always support this initiative, please keep doing such meaningful work.”

Resident Testimonials – Ripple Effect in Neighbouring Blocks

“I heard that a rangoli competition was conducted in Block 2, and I felt it was something our area needed as well. The main idea of spreading awareness in a fun and engaging way really inspired me. So, I approached the Saahas team and requested them to organize a similar event in our block. The event went very well and brought residents together, helping us understand the importance of waste segregation in an enjoyable way.”

—Bagyalakshmi, Resident, Block 3

“I came to know about the event held in Block 2 from my neighbour, and together we approached the Saahas team to conduct one in our area too. I usually don’t attend community events, but since this happened close to home, I was really happy to be part of it. The awareness activities and bin distribution by the Saahas team have truly helped us manage our waste better.”

----Shalini, Resident, Block 5