

JOINT STATEMENT

Landfills aren't the solution to Bangalore's 'waste' problem

Segregation of 'waste' at source is the only way forward

Bangalore : 23 August 2012

In recent weeks, a wholly needless crisis in managing garbage seems to have been created due to the systemic failure of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike and other agencies. It is claimed that the action of the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board forcing closure of the landfill operated by M/s Ramky at Mavallipura has provided no option to the city but to landfill wherever possible. By so stating, there are attempts to project the legally correct regulatory action of KSPCB as being against the public interest, when the fact is Ramky has been operating the landfill without any legal clearance and in criminal disregard of applicable standards, norms and laws.

It is well known that villages around Bangalore have become victim to the massive and largely illegal dumping of about 5,000 tonnes of solid waste generated daily in the city. For years now they have quietly endured the obnoxious impact of Bangalore's callousness. Several villagers have died as a direct consequence of such dumping of toxic waste, and many more are suffering a wide range of infectious and chronic illnesses. This abhorrent practice of dumping waste has destroyed village commons, farming land, grazing pastures, forests and water sources, and adversely impacted thousands of livelihoods. The pollutants released have contaminated lakes, wells, streams, the air, etc., and is finding its way back into Bangalore's population through food chains.

If villagers across Bangalore are justly standing up for *their* Fundamental Right to a Clean Environment, can BBMP force them to accept the waste under the threat of police action? The Mayor and Commissioner point to every street corner overflowing with garbage as an indication of a crisis. What is not being shared is that this is a direct consequence of BBMPs inaction over years. Waste is not being picked up for a week now and in a totally unwarranted reaction, waste piles are being set afire spreading highly carcinogenic toxic air in residential areas. All this is in total disregard of Supreme Court mandated guidelines on solid waste management. The decade old guidelines categorically direct cities to segregate waste at source, and approve of landfilling only upto 15% of the waste generated constituting of inerts (rejects). Clearly, therefore, landfilling all waste is illegal.

Taking opportunity of this systemic failure of BBMP, some entrepreneurs are aggressively promoting Waste to Energy (WTE) projects claiming this as a solution to address 'waste' problem once and for all. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Supreme court guidelines clearly lay down that WTE, like RDF or pyrolysis, can only be an option to process residual matter which can neither be composted or recycled (more as an exception). If WTE involves adopting bio-methanation or co-processing (burning waste in cement kilns) then the fundamental requirement for both these processes to work demands segregation at source. Since BBMP has comprehensively failed to promote segregation at source, it is wrong to promise residents that WTE will solve Bangalore's garbage problems.

What the city needs now is the willingness to immediately implement various short and long term measures, as quickly and opportunistically as BBMP is considering a hike in solid waste management cess. Bulk generators who contribute to 40% of the city waste must be made to start segregation and composting on site right away. If they fail to, criminal action must be initiated against them. The new Door to Door contract which makes handing over of segregated waste mandatory must be streamlined, made effective and free of all corrupt and inhuman practices. BBMP and Bangalore's residents must work together to humanely integrate waste-pickers in decentralised management of solid waste as an essential and sustainable prerequisite of such municipal services. BBMP must immediately make public its policy on Integrated Solid Waste Management and begin to comprehensively implement various measures outlined to deal with the garbage problem. Such approaches will ensure compliance with the Supreme Court Guidelines and provide a lasting approach to dealing with the garbage problem, which will only

increase with population. These measures will also help us steer towards positive solutions and out of a crisis mentality that the BBMP seems to be chronically suffering from; a situation that is being taken advantage of by various vested interests.

The fact is that much of what Bangalore now produces as “waste” is rich in organic matter that can easily be composted at source to make manure to grow gardens. The methods are easy to adopt and there are several organisations who have provided innovative solutions for various situations: houses, apartments, in offices, schools, public institutions, factories, etc.

In simple terms, if we segregate what we think now as 'waste' at source, not only will it help in reducing waste and bring it to manageable levels, but more importantly it will throw up options for the 'waste' to be dealt with in a resourceful way. This will contribute to huge savings in the current practice of transporting 'waste' out (60% of Rs. 450 crores annually for solid waste management is the trucking cost alone), but would completely prevent the need to dump waste in massive landfills – legal and illegal. Such practices, in any case, are environmentally unfriendly, contribute to climate change, adversely affect public health and are wholly unjust: for they cause havoc to the lives and livelihoods of villages surrounding Bangalore whose communities have generated none of that. For a city that prides itself of being on the forefront of advancement in science and technology, it would be a shame to create a crisis out of garbage management.

Keeping all this in view, the undersigned organisations appeal to the authorities to convert what they now consider as a 'crisis' in garbage management, into what it truly is, an opportunity to transform Bangalore into a city that makes value out of 'waste'. Each of the undersigned organisations are voluntary and not-for-profit initiatives and work with public interest as their main and only focus. *We are willing to assist the Mayor, Commissioner, Corporators, MLAs and all others involved in BBMP in making this transition progressive, environmentally intelligent, socially just and an economical prudent approach.*

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