

Guiding Principles to resolve the current Garbage Management Crisis of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike

Introduction:

The current problem of garbage management (municipal solid waste management) in Bangalore city, is reflective of a systemic failure in governance. The only way to resolve this 'crisis', created due to decades of centralised planning and weak or no decentralisation, is to actually decentralise the waste management system. Any step forward must only evolved from developing local solid waste management solutions, and any other approach is only a step towards postponing sustainable ways to manage Bangalore's 'waste' and convert it into a resource that it truly is.

Following is an approach identified by various not for profit public interest organisations in Bangalore, working in the solid waste management sector for about two decades. The solutions offered are in full cognisance of the social, economic, political, public health and ecological realities of the city.

Approach:

1. Mandate segregation of waste at source

The city generates about 5000 tonnes of solid waste daily. Much of this waste is organic and can and should be composted. Mandating segregation of waste at source is clearly possible under the current legal regime. Many communities across the city are practicing this for years, demonstrating its feasibility.

Once waste is segregated at source, almost all the organic refuse can be immediately composted and the recyclable material can become resource within the neighbourhood. Only electronic and bio-medical wastes need to be specially treated as per applicable norms. Such an approach will contribute massive savings in fuel and trucking costs, bring down cost of human resources required to manage waste, prevent the need for landfilling and protect public health and environment. What's more, it will provide valuable manure that can be used in gardening. Importantly, this approach will restore dignity to waste handlers, who are currently dealing most unhygienically with mixed waste, day in and day out.

Typically, there is always reaction to such an approach, often negative. Lethargy of the public to adopt segregation of waste at source, pampered as they have been by collection of waste from door-to-door (due to low labour costs) can be immediately changed by a combination of public education and strong regulation. Information, environmental education and communication material is already available for such a process to be brought into force with immediate effect.

2. Incentivise composting at source for individual homes/businesses and promote community composting units.

The massive public response to pay BBMP when small rebate is extended for advance property tax payment has clearly demonstrated the popularity of incentivising progressive efforts of the public. While it is the mandatory duty of the BBMP to handle municipal solid waste, households and businesses who handle their waste by composting at source must be incentivised. This will encourage more and more communities to ensure that they will not burden the BBMP's waste management system everyday. The incentive approach may be *in lieu* of the current system of collecting SWM cess.

3. Mandatory composting by bulk generators

All bulk generators must be forced to compost at source without exception and as per standards. Bulk generators contribute 40% of the waste produced in Bangalore and can easily segregate waste at source as they have the necessary systems and personnel demanded in place. Only such bulk generators who cannot compost at source, due to space constraints and massive capacity overload (eg. Kalyana Mantaps who handle heavy loads during wedding seasons), must hand over the segregated waste for composting elsewhere and will be specifically charged for the additional service the city renders them. This must only be exceptional and not the norm. Any violation by bulk generators of such a mandate must be severely punished, including opting for penalisation per the MSW Rules, Water and Air Act and the Environment Protection Act.

4. Only segregated waste to be collected and transported in its segregated form to individual destinations based on adoption of progressive waste stream management practices.

The current practice of collecting waste from across the city and dumping it in landfills (both approved and illegal) has to be comprehensively dismantled. Evidence over the past decade indicates that this system breeds corruption, offers little or no benefit to public health and environment and is an expensive affair given the high costs of fuel involved. Such a practice is carbon intensive, climate unfriendly and perpetuates a culture of waste generation. A systematic and progressive waste stream management practice will emphasise the need for creating minimal waste; the segregation of waste at source; treatment and recycling of waste at source (as much as is possible); collection of waste in its segregated forms to allow for composting and recycling; transporting of segregated wastes to processing and treatment centres, and landfilling of only the inert material that has absolutely no value for society.

5. Mandate decentralised waste management with support from BBMP with emphasis on waste management within ward.

The policy of BBMP must be to ensure total autonomy and independence to each and every ward to manage their waste to the maximum extent possible, and within the ward. The immediate and transparent constitution of Ward Committees is essential and critical to ensure high citizen participation in management of waste at the ward level in collaboration with the Corporator and BBMP Ward Staff. This will also build a very high level of local ownership to ward level functions, a desirable feature in handling complex tasks as waste management locally. Such a process will also help integrate various progressive community level initiatives (such as by Apartment and Resident Welfare Associations) into the ward management functions, incentivise progressive action, promote community policing against defaulters, induce a sense of pride in ward maintenance and management, and also support innovative practices in segregating waste at source, promoting composting of waste at source or in designated civic amenity areas, economically viable development of dry waste collection centres, maintenance of market waste composting and bio-methanation, and perhaps even 'Art from Waste' projects. All in all, this will support making Bangalore a public health conscious, environmentally sensitive and economically prudent urban area built on very high participation of local communities.

6. Protect Rights of Pourakarmikas and Waste Pickers and mandate their integration in progressive waste stream management practices

Currently about 6,000 waste pickers have already been organised with ID Cards by various voluntary initiatives and they must be integrated into the waste management system along with Pourakarmikas.

7. Pourakarmika services to be professionalised, provided tenure and operate under BBMP control with

ward level supervision.

It is critical for the for the labour and occupational rights of Pourakarmikas and Waste Pickers to be strictly protected to ensure waste management processes work systematically, effectively and efficiently. The most consistent problem in waste management in Bangalore has been the extraordinary exploitation of Pourakarmikas and Waste Pickers, and their necessary and frequent protests to protect their Rights. Not only are Pourakarmikas not paid regularly, especially by private contractors, they are also forced to work in highly hazardous conditions, without any occupational safeguards and health benefits. The Karnataka High Court's strict ruling in safeguarding the occupational and human rights of workers of BWSSB must be kept in mind here, as the BBMP Pourakarmikas (both directly employed and also through contractors) and waste pickers are exposed to similar risks. Protecting their worker rights and health will encourage them provide their best for the city with dignity and pride. This demands professionalising their services, integrating them into the payroll systems with increments and other benefits (as is provided for all other workers) and ensuring that they are treated with dignity.

8. Mandated Extended Producer Responsibility

There is little or no attention paid today for the burden of waste generated by manufacturers of products and packaging material. Extended Producer Responsibilities must be mandated as a fundamental component of overall waste management efforts. Not only should non-recyclable material use, especially in consumer products and packaging, be actively discouraged by innovative use of existing municipal laws, but the process must move towards insisting on manufacturers utilising material with emphasis on recycling value after use. Buy back and take back arrangements must be integrated into the overall waste management system.

9. Only inert material to be landfilled with tipping fee per MSW Rules.

The current practice of land-filling all waste must be immediately suspended. Waste segregation at source must become an active and immediate practice, recycling must be undertaken locally, and only inert material must be landfilled per MSW Rules. All current contracts with landfill operators must be immediately reworked to promoted this approach. This will contribute to enormous savings of fuel, infrastructure (trucks), land and also prevent damage to health and environment, especially of rural communities who now suffer the consequences.

10. Service Level Benchmarks (SWM) and Waste Information Systems to be integrated.

Service level benchmarking promote progressive management of solid waste and provide an efficient yardstick for comparison of practices, budgeting, regulation and penalisation. This practice must be integrated into all solid waste management processes. BBMP must immediately institute Public Education and Waste Information Systems, in active collaboration with not for profit initiatives that have evolved this systems to a very high level of practicality, and ensure that every household, public institution, shopping centre, market, factory, hospital, mass media, etc. become partners in this process of making Bangalore a city that makes value out of waste, and a model for the world to emulate. We do not need oversease experts, as all these competencies are well provided locally. Pride in associating with local communities, voluntary initiatives, etc. will take us a long way away from the current mess. There is also no need for foreign trips to learn about waste management practices – they have not produced any benefits to the public in the past and are most unlikely to do so in the future.

11. All statutory norms and penal provisions to be enforced.

Statutory norms exist so that they can be complied with. Penal provisions in law exist to streamline the system

by punishing violators. Strict adherence to such Rule of Law procedures will ensure that much of the governance failures currently attending waste management in Bangalore can be avoided and a thing of the past. This approach will also build transparency and accountability in the system and prevent cartelisation, corruption and exploitation of workers and impacted communities.

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