

WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RECYCLING IN BANGALORE

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINE LUTRINGER

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1. The new law on waste segregation seems to shift responsibility to the community level. What resources are in place for communities to manage this?

Two different waste management systems are underway in Bangalore, according to the type of housing: individual houses and large housing complexes. In large apartment blocks, the key responsibility lies with community institutions such as the Residents Welfare Associations. They manage the garbage collection, storage and disposal within the housing complex. Residents need to segregate waste: specific bins are provided for the different types of waste, which is then collected door-to door by the employees of the RWA. Residents pay monthly service charges to the RWA for the different services they provide, which includes waste collection and management. Space is needed within the apartment complex to store the waste before it is disposed of: recyclables are sold, dry waste is picked up by contractors or by dry waste collection centres while wet waste is to be composted on site. RWA therefore also need to put in place composting facilities. The BBMP (Bangalore's municipal corporation) is in charge of the collection of the other wastes, such as electronic waste or biomedical waste.

2. There seems to be some resistance from people. As we know, changing habits can take time. What in your opinion has facilitated waste segregation in the home?

In fact, residents play a key role: waste segregation basically means that they need to keep wet and dry wastes separately, so that dry waste can be recycled and wet waste can be composted. Dry waste consists of materials such as paper, plastics, metal, glass, rubber, thermocol, in other words anything that can be kept for an extended period without decomposing. All glass and plastic containers must be cleaned and rinsed of food residues. The challenges encountered by the people and organizations involved in the waste collection - even before the change in the law - was to convince the citizens of the importance of separating waste at source, in a context where Bangalore's waste management system has been afflicted by a range of problems. Against this backdrop, committed citizens, community organizations, solid waste workers and the staff employed in apartment complexes have done a significant work at all levels in explaining the system and the citizens' role in it. It is important as well to get the staff working as family helps, such as cooks and maids, to understand and participate in the system. In our research we have come across different types of initiatives that have helped sensitize residents. Some of them are targeted at children, such as playful events where the process of waste segregation in coloured bins is explained. Some residents associations have also devised a system of fines for non compliance. In this case, the residents who have given their waste unsegregated receive a notice by text message informing them about it. This system works as the waste is collected door to door so the employees manage to track the 'offenders'. More broadly, the

mediatisation of the issue of waste management in Bangalore has contributed to raise awareness among the population. Public authorities should take advantage of this favorable context to develop environmental education initiatives, particularly in schools. In this respect, it would be useful to build on the experience of community organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have been working in this field for many years.

3. Urban gardens seem to be a new trend in Bangalore. Can you comment on this?

Bangalore used to be known as the 'Garden City' of India due to the extent and the diversity of the natural cover. In the last few decades, the size of green areas has decreased and the metropolitan area has been facing problems of water supply due to the progressive dismantlement of its historic tank system. In this context, efforts to address environmental issues have included attempts to influence practices at the micro level. Today an increasing number of families use systems of rain water harvesting on the one hand and of composting on the other hand. As waste needs to be segregated at source, home composting is encouraged and can be easily done in a pot system or in any aerated container. The compost generated can then be used for gardening. We have found that urban gardening is increasingly popular among Bangalore's middle classes, both because products and services related to composting and urban gardening are easily available, and because Bangaloreans 'rediscover' a traditional way to grow food. The growing attention paid to genuine and organic food, as well as the popularity of social media that discuss ecological and healthy lifestyles, also account for this trend.

4. Waste workers are being organized around waste segregation facilities. Do you see this as a positive trend?

Relying on the figures available at the all-India level, more than 90% of the waste workers are women from economically and socially disadvantaged situations. The *pourakarmikas*, (the local name given to waste workers in Bangalore) are performing a key role and their working conditions need to be improved. Apart from the *pourakarmikas* that are directly employed by the BBMP (Bangalore's municipal corporation; as opposed to those employed by contractors), the organization of waste workers takes place increasingly through NGOs and social enterprises that work for specific housing complexes. These organizations usually explicitly aim to improve the livelihoods of *pourakarmikas*. In addition, the involvement of the staff of the organization, who liaises with the residents and the other stakeholders of the local system of waste management, often proves useful for the waste workers to get their work respected and supported.

5. Is de-centralization a viable solution for waste management in a city such as Bangalore?

Our research highlights the diversity of factors that affect the different stages of the management of waste: they are institutional and technological but also socio-cultural. As shown in the film, there is a range of social practices that enable the entire system to function. The influence of policies therefore need to be understood in their broader social context. Basically, the objective of the new rules on solid waste management in Bangalore is to reduce the waste that gets landfilled. Policy efforts should aim to improve the functioning

of the system, starting from the household, enterprise or community level until the macro level, that of the overall solid waste management system of the city. Decentralization seems to be an appropriate solution, provided it actually leads to connect the different levels and the different stakeholders. More generally, the decentralization process that has been initiated in Bangalore requires that all the 198 wards, which correspond to the smallest political and administrative units of the city, have elected ward committees. If these ward committees become fully integrated in the political life of the city, it will contribute to make local governance more inclusive and more effective.