

From Vulnerability to Leadership: Lessons from a Multi-Sectoral Initiative for Women Waste Pickers in India



3D Program

FOR GIRLS & WOMEN

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Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) is a trade union in Pune, India, that brings together waste pickers, itinerant waste buyers, waste collectors and other informal recyclers. We recover, collect, categorise and sell scrap materials for recycling. We also provide garbage collection, composting and related waste management services. Our members are self employed workers.

Website: <http://www.KKPKP-Pune.org/>



SWaCH is India's first wholly-owned cooperative of self-employed waste collectors and other urban poor. It is an autonomous enterprise that provides front-end waste management services to the citizens of Pune. Our mission is to engage an entrepreneurial workforce of waste pickers into an efficient, responsive and accountable organisation and work in partnership with the municipal solid waste management system to transform the SWM situation in Pune.

Website: <https://SWaCHcoop.com/>

CEE

Centre for Environment Education

The **Centre for Environment Education (CEE)** strives to improve public awareness and understanding of the environment and promote the sustainable use of natural resources. CEE works with partners and various stakeholders to connect people and share experiences on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at a local, national and global level. CEE is committed to ensuring that recognition is given to the role of education in the promotion of sustainable development.

Website: <https://CEEIndia.org>



3D Program
FOR GIRLS & WOMEN

The **3D Program for Girls and Women** advances gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment by helping local governments work more efficiently across departments, and with civil society and the private sector, to increase economic opportunities for girls and women and address their health, education and safety needs.

Website: <https://the3DProgram.org/>

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FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

From 2017 to 2021, the 3D Program for Girls and Women has advanced gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment by helping local governments work with civil society and the private sector, while strengthening women's voices and platforms to hold government accountable. Since the Program was launched in 2017, it has demonstrated how convergent action or multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approaches can advance gender equality, with a focus on the economic empowerment, health, education and public safety of girls and women. With a small team hosted at the United Nations Foundation in Washington DC, USA, the Program worked with government, civil society and private sector partners to implement our rural and urban programs and demonstrate our approach in Pune District, Maharashtra State, India.

In 2020, following a fruitful foundational phase, and in consultation with our partners, the 3D Program made the decision to transfer ownership of the program to our implementing partners in India to scale up programmatic components and to close our operations in Washington, DC. The transition is being conducted against the backdrop of two significant global conditions that have informed the process – the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted our operations and the availability of resources; and the global reckoning around international development, which led us to intentionally consider how to transform the structure of our partnership and program. We designed and implemented the transition in consultation with our implementing partners, relying on our mutual trust and their expertise and guidance for the best way forward to scale up the models that we had co-created and implemented. The transition will take place in 2021.

This report provides a review of the 3D Program's urban program over the past four years, describing our approach to advance the economic empowerment and social inclusion of informal women workers, specifically waste pickers in the city of Pune. The report includes program objectives, activities between 2017-2019, challenges and progress achieved in 2020 and 2021 including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and lessons learned and reflections from our partnerships and programs. This report was jointly written by Lakshmi Narayanan, Senior Consultant, Urban Programs and Sia Nowrojee, Executive Director of the 3D Program, drawing on the wisdom and contributions of the entire urban program team, including Poornima Chikarmane, Harshad Barde, Sarthak Tapasvi, Sanskriti Menon and Avinash Madhale.

We are grateful to our urban partners Kagad, Kach, Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), their cooperative, SWaCH, and the Centre for Environment Education (CEE) for their collaborative partnership and visionary work to organize and empower the waste pickers of Pune City. Special thanks to the officials and frontline workers in the Government of Maharashtra, the Pune Municipal Corporation and the Pune Smart City Development Corporation Limited who advocate for the inclusion of waste pickers and championed the program. We are grateful to the private sector partners, such as Essity, Allforasmile, Yardi and Forbes Marshall who contributed resources and expertise to our work in Pune City, and were particularly responsive during the COVID-19 crisis. Last but not least, we are grateful to the waste pickers of Pune, who provide a vital service and serve as leaders in solid waste management and demonstrate the power of collective action and community organizing.

As we close our DC operations, we also want to acknowledge the partnership and support we received from our Program Advisory Committee over the four years of the program (see inside back cover for members). We are grateful to the United Nations Foundation for providing a home and a shared vision for gender equality. Finally, we thank our donor the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for their support and commitment to gender equality.

Vanessa Coello, Senior Program Associate
Sia Nowrojee, Executive Director
Geeta Rao Gupta, Founder and Senior Advisor



BACKGROUND

The 3D Program for Girls and Women was launched in 2017 to advance gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment by helping local governments work more efficiently across departments, and with civil society and the private sector, while strengthening women's voices and platforms to hold government accountable. From 2017 to 2021, the program facilitated convergent action that brought together stakeholders across sectors to increase girls' and women's economic opportunities and address their health, education and safety needs in rural and urban Pune District in Maharashtra State, India.

In the city of Pune, the program decided to focus on waste pickers, of whom over 70 per cent are women, to support their collective platforms, leverage the resources and goodwill of the private sector, and engage and strengthen outcomes for municipal services. Waste pickers are traditionally poor, Dalit, disenfranchised women informal workers. In Pune City, they are organized and are contributing to a unique, equitable, economically efficient, environmentally robust waste collection and processing system. Their economic, social and environmental contributions to the city are impressive - they collect over 600 tons of waste each day, 90 tons of which is diverted from landfills and recycled, and up to 8 tons is composted daily. Waste pickers also generate much-needed income and many are the sole breadwinners of their families. Despite this, the livelihoods and social welfare of waste pickers remain persistently vulnerable. The 3D Program worked to address these economic and social vulnerabilities in partnership with the Pune-based waste pickers' union Kagad, Kach, Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), their cooperative, SWaCH, and the Centre for Environment Education (CEE).¹

KKPKP and SWaCH have worked, since 1993 and 2007 respectively, to increase the visibility, recognition, endorsement, integration and formalization of the work done by waste pickers in Pune. SWaCH, their autonomous cooperative, has provided front-end waste management services to the citizens of Pune via a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), since 2007. The agreement integrates waste pickers into the city's solid waste management (SWM) system without employing them as government workers, enabling them to maintain their independence and flexibility of work hours. CEE has played a pivotal


¹ For more information on each partner visit <http://www.kkpkp-pune.org/>; <https://swachcoop.com/>; <https://www.ceeindia.org/>; and <https://the3dprogram.org/>.



SWaCH members Rani Shivaji Gaikawad (left) and Sangita Anil Mahendrakar at a SWaCH material recovery facility (MRF). Photo by the 3D Program.

role in the genesis and support of decentralized waste management through the SWaCH cooperative. CEE's nuanced knowledge of SWM and sustainability goals for the city has strengthened its role as an advocacy and outreach support partner working closely with SWaCH and KKPKP. The goal of the 3D Program for Girls and Women mirrors the larger objectives of SWaCH and KKPKP, and the partnership presented an opportunity to further strengthen their processes, ensure expansion, and work towards the structured institutionalization of a sustainable and inclusive SWM system.

The partnership also enabled a collective leveraging of the distinct identities and political, social, financial and administrative spaces occupied by each organization, to best achieve their common mandate of empowering girls and women economically, politically and socially, while maximizing their access to government and private



sector entitlements and resources. While the partnership focused on waste pickers and SWM, there are relevant lessons that have broader applications for other groups of women informal workers.

This report provides a review of the 3D Program's urban program over the past four years, including program objectives, activities between 2017-2019, challenges and progress achieved in 2020 and 2021, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and lessons learned and reflections from the partnership.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Reflecting the shared priorities of the 3D Program, KKPKP, SWaCH and CEE, three objectives were jointly identified for the urban program:

1. Securing **sustainable livelihoods** for waste pickers by integrating them into the city's SWM system and providing them with additional income-generating opportunities through a zero-waste model;
2. Increasing the **social inclusion** of waste pickers and their families by improving their access to and utilization of social welfare benefits, programs and services; and
3. Improving the **public and occupational safety** of waste pickers as they collect and sort waste for recycling and disposal.

The goal was to make progress towards a comprehensive model of operations that advances the economic empowerment and social inclusion of vulnerable women informal workers.



ACTIVITIES BETWEEN 2017 AND 2019

To achieve the program objectives, in line with the 3D Program's convergent approach, key stakeholders across sectors were engaged towards the larger vision of the empowerment of waste pickers. This includes waste pickers' representatives, waste pickers themselves, leadership and staff from relevant departments of state and municipal government, and representatives of civil society organizations, research organizations, public-private initiatives, and the corporate sector. Between 2017 and 2019, significant progress was made towards achieving the three objectives.

A. Securing Sustainable Livelihoods and Increasing Incomes of Waste Pickers

Currently, SWaCH members are paid a user fee of INR (Indian Rupee) 70 (approximately one US dollar (USD)) per month by each household whose waste they collect. This income is supplemented by revenue from the sale of recyclable scrap they retrieve from household waste. Collectively, their average income from both sources is INR 12,000 (approximately 171 USD) per month for about six hours of work each day, which compares favorably with the minimum wage of Maharashtra State. However, waste pickers are constantly at risk of losing their livelihoods because they are semi-formal workers dependent on agreement renewals with the municipality and the willingness of citizens to pay their waste pick-up fees. With the increasing privatization of public services, waste pickers are also now competing with sophisticated and politically connected private contractors who offer municipalities convenient but not ecologically sound SWM services.

To secure sustainable livelihoods for waste pickers, increase their incomes, and safeguard their position as SWM leaders, experts and implementers in the municipal system, the 3D Program partners designed a zero-waste model in which waste pickers play a central role. Zero-waste models offer a higher livelihood generation potential than centralized, capital-intensive collection and transportation contracts that tend to favor and feed the private contractor lobby. This model enhances and upgrades the role of waste pickers, expanding the scope of their work to include separate handling of sanitary waste, collection of low value plastics, reprocessing of high value plastics, second-hand or reuse stores, and in-situ composting. The model also includes several revenue sources to diversify and enhance their incomes. Under a voluntary Extended



Producer Responsibility pilot program, the manufacturers of sanitary products have committed to paying waste pickers per kilogram of sanitary waste handled by them, while the manufacturers of low value plastics have committed to paying for related waste in addition to the coordination, transportation and logistics costs incurred in collecting this material. Additionally, the reprocessing of high value plastics into filament in decentralized processing units offers an opportunity to create livelihoods for waste pickers who work in these units and to increase the per kilogram rate of processed plastics significantly. Second-hand or reuse shops employ waste pickers and their children to collect items such as clothes, toys, furniture and utensils from middle class citizens and resell them at reasonable rates to waste pickers and other urban poor. Finally, in-situ composting of organic waste offers the dual advantages of redeploying vehicles transporting this waste to the transport recyclables, saving waste pickers the time, labor and money of doing so, while generating additional sources of income in the actual processing of organics for a service fee.

In 2018, a formal study was conducted, led by CEE, engaging stakeholders and experts across India to explore alternative institutional arrangements to best structure the zero-waste initiative.² The Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) Pune Smart City Development Corporation Limited (PSCDCL) was identified as the best entity to incubate the experimental and innovative phase in one ward of the city (Aundh), prior to take over and scale-up by the PMC's SWM Department across the city of Pune. PSCDCL issued a bid and a three-year contract for INR 30,000,000 (approximately USD 444,000) was awarded to a consortium of SWaCH and CEE in March 2019 for an outreach campaign consisting of a customized, door-to-door, citizen-centered approach through trained educators selected from local communities in Aundh. This campaign leveraged the fact that waste pickers of SWaCH are the most appropriate agents of outreach, as they interact with the citizens they service daily and are experts in waste materials and handling. Engaging them formally in the outreach campaign reinforces their position as professional managers of waste, empowered to communicate directly and formally with service recipients. Furthermore, the engagement encourages citizens to understand various types of waste and issues related to handling and recycling. This paves the way for more sensitive consumption and the reduced generation of wastes that are difficult or dangerous for waste pickers to handle.

² For more information see Ranjit Gadgil and Sanskriti Menon, *Solid Waste Management in Pune: A Desired Future*. Washington DC: 3D Program for Girls and Women, 2018



Bureaucratic delays, transfers of government officials, and state government elections thwarted timely action within PSCDCL and the process was delayed. However, the presence of stronger, more engaged officials at the appropriate levels of seniority within the PMC offered a potentially more resilient, sustainable and immediate alternative to the PSCDCL. In October 2019, the PMC invited the 3D Program, SWaCH, KKPKP and CEE to form a Working Group to create a city-level zero-waste SWM blueprint. The Working Group would have representatives from local philanthropies, including the Yardi Software Foundation and Tata Trusts, and other interested private and public sector donors, as well as civil society organizations and technical experts working on SWM, good governance, data-based planning, and sustained, sensitive citizen outreach.

This institutional mechanism, the Working Group, would create a participatory, decentralized, economically efficient, environmentally robust implementation plan to advance zero-waste SWM, based on minimization of wet waste at source through the promotion of in-situ composting and maximizing recycling through the inclusion of waste pickers as both citizen educators and managers of neighborhood composting units. The Working Group would also serve as a network to increase the pool of resources available to marginalized women and girls by strengthening existing governance mechanisms and institutional arrangements to ensure smooth, seamless, participatory and empowering access to government and non-government processes and services. It was also envisaged that the three program objectives would be incorporated, strengthened and institutionalized under the aegis of the Working Group (see Appendix 1 for the Working Group Terms of Reference).

The idea of the Working Group was welcomed by senior administrative officials who recognize the need for active engagement of all relevant stakeholders, value the expertise brought in by the informal sector, and appreciate the need for capacity building of municipal staff. However, they also noted that direct municipal financial support of the Working Group would require a cumbersome, formally tendered process, allowing only empaneled consultants,³ who often have little or no stake in the city, to apply. They indicated that indirect support in the form of official endorsement of the group would be easier to provide, and could enable external



support from corporates and donors. The 3D Program and partners therefore agreed to leverage these resources from other stakeholders and funders.

B. Increasing Social Inclusion of Waste Pickers and their Families

To increase the social inclusion of waste pickers and their families, the 3D Program partners first focused on identifying the barriers to accessing social programs, services and entitlements, and then designed solutions to address those barriers. In 2018, the 3D Program supported an in-depth mapping and analysis of the existing health, credit, educational, social security and other welfare benefits and schemes provided by the government, waste picker member-based organizations, private sector institutions, financial institutions and NGOs. Waste pickers' perceptions of these schemes and their experiences accessing them were systematically documented. Cases reported by waste picker members to a dedicated KKPKP helpdesk and helpline were monitored and evaluated along several parameters for a period of three months.⁴

Based on this analysis, a hub-and-spoke service delivery model was designed to facilitate more equitable access to, and higher utilization of, services and implementation began in 2019. The model includes a centralized Kashtakari Helpdesk (Kashtakari Sadhan Kendra) and 10 decentralized community-based Kashtakari Seva Kendras (KSKs) or community centers, located in slums across Pune where waste pickers and their families live. Each kendra is staffed by a local team consisting of an enumerator, two community mobilizers called sunbais, who are typically the daughters-in-law of the waste pickers, and youth volunteers.⁵ Together they help waste pickers and their family members identify and enroll online for government benefits, entitlements and programs and address any problems they face. The model builds on the original KKPKP helpdesk and helpline, which continue to function, directing members to appropriate resources or to the KSKs to address immediate needs and facilitate problem-solving. The model also engages waste pickers in

³ Empaneled consultants are those who fulfill the eligibility criteria to provide services to the municipality and are bound by an agreement or memorandum of understanding.

⁴ For more information see Poornima Chikarmane, with Sia Nowrojee and Kalkidan Shebi, *Pathways to Inclusion: Social Protection and Public Services for Informal Workers in Pune, India*. Washington DC: 3D Program for Girls and Women, 2019

⁵ For more information on the model see *Services Within Reach: Breaking Down Barriers for Informal Workers*. Case Studies in Convergence Series, no. 2, Washington, DC: 3D Program for Girls and Women, 2020.



advocating for their own entitlements and services. Utilization of the kendras is being tracked and the model is being assessed for use by other groups of informal workers.

At the same time, 3D Program partners continued to engage waste pickers in advocacy on social inclusion, providing important inputs in municipal, state and national policy discussions on issues ranging from pension rights to universal health



Top: An original material recovery facility (MRF) structure. Bottom: A remodeled MRF. Photos by SWaCH.



coverage (UHC). At the municipal level, the partners worked with the PMC to jointly set measurable targets for improved outcomes in health, education, safety and livelihoods for waste pickers and their families, particularly their daughters. These include improved access to schemes; higher allocations in budgets for the welfare of waste pickers; and facilitating access through single-window systems to reduce delays, repeat visits to multiple municipal departments, significant time away from work, and money expended by waste pickers while applying for entitlements.

C. Improving the Public and Occupational Safety of Waste Pickers

To improve the public and occupational safety of waste pickers, 3D Program partners focused on repairing and building material recovery facilities (MRFs). MRFs are different kinds of shelters where waste pickers can sort and store recyclables they collect into various categories for sale to scrap traders. MRFs are a critical part of the infrastructure required in any decentralized SWM model, but particularly in the SWaCH model, where the sale of scrap contributes to the revenue generated by waste pickers. The MRFs enable waste pickers to collect a critical mass of recyclables which helps streamline sales to scrap traders and cut down on costs. Additionally, MRFs provide shelter from the elements, traffic, animals and hostile citizens. Larger, mega-MRFs include toilets and drinking water.

In consultations with waste pickers, quality MRFs emerged as a high but unaddressed priority, affecting their daily work conditions, safety, earnings, perceptions of them, and their dignity and health. In fact, despite the formal MOU between the municipality and SWaCH mandating the provision of MRFs, less than a twentieth of the demand was directly fulfilled by the PMC, catering to less than 300 SWaCH waste pickers, a tenth of the membership.

In 2018, an exploratory meeting convened by the 3D Program team with a local philanthropist led to a generous grant of INR 1,75,00,000 (approximately USD 250,000) to identify gaps and build more MRFs. First, existing and new MRFs were mapped and plotted on a GIS platform, enabling the tracking of recyclables from

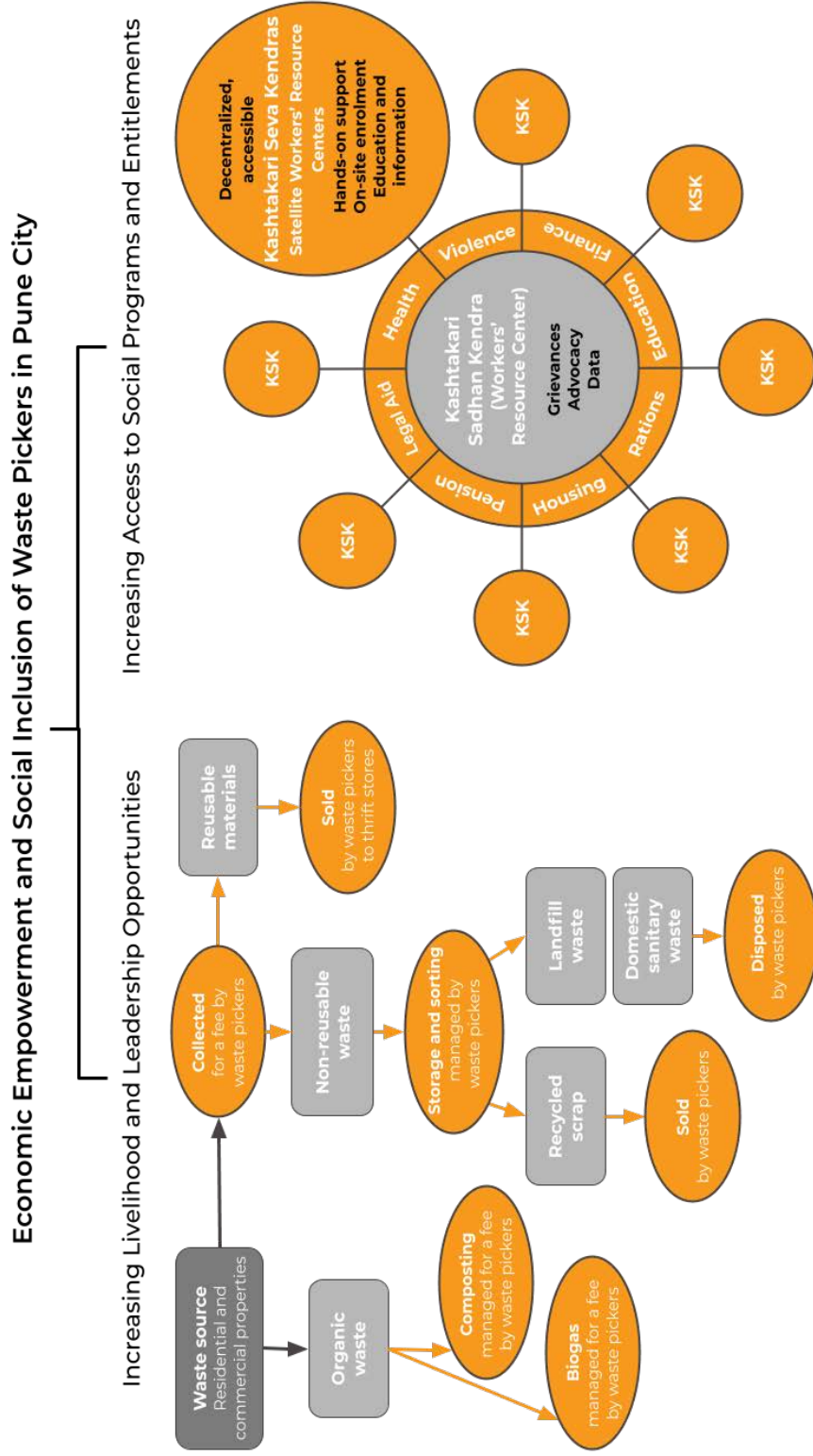


A mega-material recovery facility (MRF). Photo by SWaCH.

MRFs to scrap traders, and an area-wise volumetric analysis of waste. In addition to mapping the locations where MRFs were needed, this also offered the potential to track the entire value chain of recyclables and explore other opportunities to leverage higher rates for scrap through collective bargaining with scrap dealers or by setting up cooperative scraps stores. The resources were also used to upgrade existing MRFs and build new facilities, including four mega-MRFs with toilets and drinking water, ensuring protected spaces for over 500 waste pickers. The MRFs were designed to be aesthetically attractive, decorated with the SWaCH brand and educational murals, further contributing to the professionalization and dignity of the waste pickers. The grant was maximized by inviting local contractors and architects to provide pro bono or subsidized services to repair, design and build MRFs. Additionally, the grant leveraged a commitment from the PMC to construct an additional 10 mega-MRFs at cost, and an offer from another corporate partner to contribute INR 1,00,00,000 (approximately USD 140,000) to construct five mega-MRFs.

The progress made in these three streams of work contributed to the 3D Program's comprehensive model of operations to advance the economic empowerment and social inclusion of vulnerable women informal workers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Advancing the Economic Empowerment and Social Inclusion of Women Informal Workers





CHALLENGES FACED IN 2020 AND 2021

In 2020-21, the 3D Program continued its work towards the achievement of the three objectives. However, program activities were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which crippled the already overburdened finances, systems and processes of critical local, state and central government stakeholders, and further marginalized the poor in an unprecedented way. At the same time, the pandemic revealed the utility, resilience and strength of the program's model and partners, and waste pickers themselves.

A. The Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic made the lives, work and living conditions of informal workers even more precarious. Waste pickers, particularly those like SWaCH members who are integrated in municipal SWM systems, were deemed 'essential service providers/workers' during the pandemic and had to show up for work daily, in the unimaginable context of the strictly enforced lockdown. They never had the option of working from home like middle and upper middle-income groups, or suspending work like other informal workers.

A total of 3,540 SWaCH waste pickers working within the jurisdiction of the PMC, and 580 KKP KP waste pickers working within the neighboring jurisdiction of Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation, provided solid waste collection during the pandemic. They continued to collect, transport and sort waste daily despite a lack of personal protective equipment (PPE), sustained pressure from their families and neighbors to stop working, and disrupted public transportation to get to work,⁶ exposing themselves to waste material from over 1,000,000 households. An additional 3,000 informal and itinerant KKP KP waste pickers and 1,000 elderly waste pickers who rely on the daily sale of recyclables for their income simply could not afford to suspend their work to protect their health. In the first three months of the pandemic in Pune, a total of 117 waste pickers and several family members tested positive for COVID-19. Tragically, by July 2020, four waste pickers and 40 of their family members had died of COVID-19. Given the strain on public health systems, co-morbidities and the stigma attached to COVID-19, the fatalities are likely much higher than reported.

⁶ For more information see Lakshmi Narayanan, *Stories of Courage: Women Working in the Time of COVID-19*, 3D Program blog, April 2020, <https://the3dprogram.org/stories-of-courage-women-working-in-the-time-of-covid-19/>



SWaCH member Rajshree Vitthal Sutar wears a mask as she collects waste during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Photo by SWaCH.

The entire workforce of waste pickers was therefore a critical group in need of support. In addition to their occupational risks, most waste pickers live and work in crowded public spaces, often without adequate facilities to prevent infection. Family members of waste pickers, who are often daily wage or informal sector workers, were unable to find work. The waste pickers needed urgent, ongoing support in the form of PPE to keep them safe as they continued to work, and many others lost income or found it difficult to access rations and other critical supplies.

Time and resources were diverted from other 3D Program activities to ensure waste pickers and their families, as well as other informal workers, could receive that support. Additionally, as 'essential service providers/workers', SWaCH staff and members were exempt throughout the lockdown. This enabled them to freely travel around the city, procure vital supplies, and facilitate the distribution of rations and other supplies to waste pickers and other informal workers. With municipal and



police permission, SWaCH and KKPKP members and staff facilitated the distribution of PEE and food rations to 8,500 waste pickers and 2,000 other informal workers. Additionally, a fundraising campaign reaching out to corporates, philanthropies and civil society raised a total of INR 7,00,00,000 (approximately USD 959,000) towards the procurement and distribution of PPE and ration relief kits for waste pickers and INR 50,00,000 (approximately USD 68,500) to address the needs of other informal workers. Additionally, the relative mobility of SWaCH staff and members enabled senior leadership to reach out to organizations of other informal workers including domestic workers, rickshaw drivers, sex workers, street vendors, luggage porters, migrant workers and home-based workers to offer support to the most vulnerable and hardest hit among them.

This broad network gradually developed into a support and pressure group, advocating with city and state officials on issues ranging from access to hospital beds and reduced costs for treatment and testing, to fair treatment of the urban poor who tested positive or were under quarantine. The network also highlighted issues related to the provision of food rations through the Public Distribution System⁷ to workers with or without Aadhar⁸-linked ration cards, ensuring that workers could report complaints if they were denied relief provided by the Government of the State of Maharashtra. The COVID Virodhi Jan Abhiyan (People's Movement Against COVID), of which KKPKP and SWaCH are members, undertook a massive citizen outreach campaign on safe practices during the pandemic, engaging informal workers to spread these messages creatively among the citizens of Pune.

As a result of this advocacy, all SWaCH waste pickers have had access to the requisite PPE at the desired frequency throughout the pandemic and will continue to receive them on a monthly basis through the end of the financial year, following which the PMC has committed to making it available.

B. The Loss of Program Champions in Government

In 2020, Pune emerged as “the COVID capital of India”. This led to pressures on local government systems and officials, as well as frequent transfers of senior officials, as the government tried to match expertise to the immediate health needs of the city.

⁷ For more information on the Public Distribution System visit <http://mahafaod.gov.in/website/english/PDS.aspx>

⁸ National identification number cards



As a result, the program lost both the long-term and recently engaged champions, including PMC officials who had encouraged and strengthened the concept of the Working Group in the first place. This delayed some of the 3D Program partnership efforts that were dependent on their active support and changed the context for some initiatives as newer officials replaced incumbents within the municipal system.

PROGRESS ON PROGRAM ACTIVITIES IN 2020-2021

While activities with government stakeholders were impacted by COVID-19, activities that relied on engagement with civil society organizations, philanthropies, corporates and SWaCH and KKPKP efforts moved ahead as scheduled. COVID-19 essentially stress-tested the program models, particularly the door-to-door service provided by the waste pickers and the kendra model, validating the critical role they play in providing public services and in highlighting and filling gaps when public services fail. While the program had to adjust, progress – sometimes slow and sometimes unexpected – was made towards the achievement of the three program objectives.

A. Securing the Livelihoods of Waste Pickers

2020 was the year when the Working Group, the logical and institutional outcome of the partnership, was scheduled to be established within the PMC. With the endorsement of PMC leadership, the Working Group was envisaged as the perfect platform to engage closely with the municipality as the nodal government agency to achieve the shared, multi-sectoral mandate of empowering waste pickers economically, politically and socially through the zero-waste model. However, due to COVID-19 and related government transfers, the Working Group was not established in 2020.

Despite this setback, KKPKP and SWaCH continued to interact formally and informally with other NGOs and private sector partners, building on existing and new partnerships, networks and advocacy campaigns to generate and maintain interest in the Working Group. Additionally, despite the disruption, the zero-waste model,



with the potential to reduce SWM costs, increase potential livelihoods in waste, and increase citizen participation, has been well-received by newly installed PMC and PSCDCL officials. The PSCDCL has committed to releasing the first installment and seeing the contract through for the citizen outreach campaign in Aundh, while the PMC has committed to replicating the zero-waste elements within its jurisdiction. Both efforts are currently moving forward in parallel, with the allocation of resources towards a decentralized face-to-face, waste picker-led citizen outreach initiative earmarked from PSCDCL, and policy regulation support and infrastructure subsidy support for composting committed by the PMC.

Additionally, other elements of the zero-waste model, including separate handling of sanitary waste, collection of low value plastics, reprocessing of high value plastics, second hand or reuse stores and in-situ composting have actually been rolled out in both Aundh, the ward covered by PSCDCL, and the larger PMC area. There has also been active support from the administration and elected representatives in the form of commitments to allocate spaces in a decentralized manner for locating MRFs and reprocessing units. The SWM Department has committed to provide 10 spaces for the decentralized processing of plastics and the Women and Child Welfare Department has passed a resolution to replicate and decentralize the location of reuse stores in 14 wards across the city.

B. Increasing Social Inclusion of Waste Pickers and their Families

When the pandemic struck in 2020, the Kashtakari Kendra hub-and-spoke service delivery model was up and running and had been servicing the most vulnerable informal workers for almost a year. The disparities and barriers that the model was designed to address, though exacerbated during the pandemic, were also effectively addressed and the model was stress tested. Decentralized points of contact and the local presence of enumerators and community mobilizers in the slum communities where waste pickers live ensured vital flows of information, immediate redress and lifesaving supplies during the COVID-19 crisis. The advantages of this model, due to its ability to reach other informal workers with multiple vulnerabilities such as domestic workers and street vendors, underlined the need for its replication across



other sectors. The advantages of the model have been recognized by the municipality and the Social Development Department provided eight spaces for locating KSKs.

Since implementation of the Kashtakari Kendra model began, enrollment in programs has increased across most sectors. A comparison of enrollment in 2018, 2019 and 2020 shows significant increases across sectors, particularly in health schemes and education scholarship schemes (see Table 1.). The comparison also revealed an exponential increase in calls to the KKKPK Helpline, a higher percentage of calls from waste pickers directly, and an increase in the range of issues raised during the calls. In the context of the pandemic and lockdowns, grievances related to accessing credit, food rations and health support skyrocketed.

The urgent supply of food rations to the most vulnerable was a critical need in the early days of the pandemic. This was facilitated through the kendras, as KKKPK members' identification was already in place through the mapping needs assessment exercise carried out earlier. Decentralized sharing of information on ration shops, state-assured entitlements by way of the Public Distribution System, and a phone-based grievance redress system to report issues with hoarding or distribution of rations by local shops kept a strong check on corrupt ration shops.

The kendras' local teams in communities have facilitated a clear, two-way flow of information addressing critical needs and preventing the inevitable fear mongering that has accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic. Outreach on immediate safety precautions at home, in the community and at work; appropriate waste disposal mechanisms for infected waste; and best practices within communities not only increased waste pickers' use of safety equipment significantly, but also made them front-line communicators on COVID-19 prevention and care during the pandemic. The immediate resolution of health-related queries, assistance with treatment for COVID-19, and support through quarantine stays, especially in the initial period, greatly assuaged the anxieties of many waste pickers and their families.

Additionally, rapid assessments on health and menstrual hygiene management needs were conducted during the pandemic. Based on that information, the two following innovative programs were implemented.

Table 1. Number of cases addressed through the Kashtakari Kendra model

Theme/Sector	2018	2019	2020
Death	43	51	83
Documentation	1	26	116
Education	152	389	255
Finance	73	153	384
Health	423	723	835
Housing	15	16	40
Legal	132	155	86
Pension	175	91	146
Food rations	19	106	1,034
Violence	0	52	106
Work	153	210	462
Other	128	39	74
Total	1,314	2,011	3,621

1. Health Support Initiative

During the COVID-19 pandemic, waste pickers suffering from chronic illnesses have not been able to receive the necessary care and medications because of loss of income, unavailability of doctors, curtailed mobility and reduced access to health care facilities and pharmacies. In response, SWaCH and KKPKP designed an intervention to reduce the risk of co-morbidities in the context of the pandemic. It involved first identifying those with chronic ailments requiring regular medication and then reimbursing the costs of those medicines through the decentralized kendra teams. The local presence of community mobilizers and enumerators ensured the seamless implementation of the intervention. A total of



439 waste pickers were identified through the needs assessment, suffering from a range of conditions, including high blood pressure, arthritis, cancer, diabetes, musculoskeletal disorders, heart conditions, mental health issues, epilepsy, and tuberculosis. Between June and November 2020, over 200 waste pickers were reimbursed for expenses towards generic medication after providing their prescriptions, reports, medical bills and bank details. The entire process was facilitated using a simple smart phone application to track the payment and monitor the continuation of treatment. Participants will be reimbursed through March 2021. So far, INR 10,00,000 (approximately USD 13,500) has been disbursed and a total of INR 18,00,000 (approximately USD 25,000) has been committed through a local corporate philanthropist. Fundraising for this initiative was undertaken by Kashtakari Panchayat Trust,⁹ and Persistent Foundation and American Jewish World Service supported the program.

2. Sustainable Menstruation Campaign

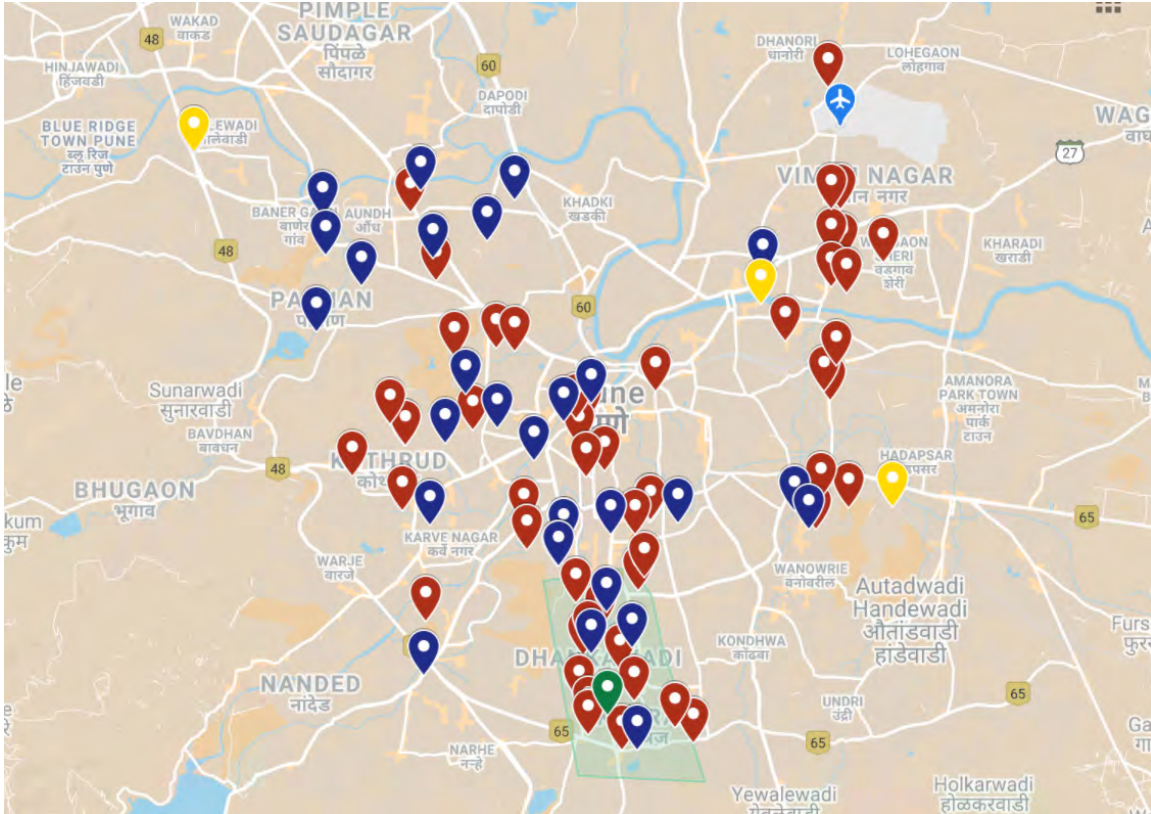
The sustainable menstruation campaign was designed to address the dual challenges faced by waste pickers handling sanitary waste and by girls and women in their families having difficulties purchasing disposable sanitary napkins during the pandemic. The program was effectively implemented through the decentralized kendra teams and also engaged the daughters, daughters-in-law and granddaughters of waste pickers who were keen to support their communities during the pandemic.






Through the program, a total of 5,000 waste pickers and women within their families are being reached by 20 community-based youth who distribute sets of reusable cloth sanitary pads and conduct sessions on sustainable menstrual hygiene management. Early feedback indicates the intervention has resulted in a reduction in both spending on disposable sanitary napkins and the volume of sanitary waste generated within the community. It has also empowered young girls and women to discuss taboo subjects openly.

Corporate funds for this project were raised by the 3D Program and its partners, KKPKP and SWaCH, from Essity and Mercedes Benz. Cloth pads were made available free of charge or at a subsidized rate by Allforasmile and Ecofemme.

⁹ Kashtakari Panchayat Trust was registered in 2010 primarily to support waste pickers and their families and their collectives. The support ranges from direct financial assistance to indirect support in the form of training, facilitation and research.

Map of Materials Recovery Facilities and other SWaCH Facilities in Pune



-  **Pinjras** – Portable, smaller sorting facilities accommodating 2-3 waste pickers' waste materials
-  **Sorting sheds** – Shelters (including MRFs) where up to 10 waste pickers can sort and store collected recyclables into various categories for sale to scrap traders
-  **Mega-MRFs** – Larger MRFs that contain toilets and drinking water accommodating approximately 40 waste pickers' waste materials
-  **Katraj Scrap Shop** – A centralized location where waste pickers can sell collected recyclables to scrap traders
-  **Coverage area** for the Katraj Scrap Shop



C. Improving the Public and Occupational Safety of Waste Pickers

In 2020-21, the construction of MRFs was impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns and related disruptions to the supply chain. The original project proposal envisaged the completion of repairs of the 60 existing sheds, construction of four mega-MRFs and 100 portable recycling units within a year. Although delayed, three mega-MRFs were constructed, 32 structures were repaired, and nine were built. Most encouraging, interest from all the stakeholders, including waste pickers, citizens, funders, PMC administrators and elected representatives has resulted in the additional allocation of space and increased financial support for these sheds. The current financial commitment for the construction of MRFs is twice what was provided by the original donor, with more interest expressed by other corporate partners and elected representatives. These stakeholders are advocating on behalf of waste pickers for the necessary public space and financial resources to build more MRFs, which are now accepted as a part of the urban landscape of Pune. Additionally, the net environmental and economic impact of the MRFs is significant as each waste picker retrieves an average of 21 kilograms (approximately 46 pounds) of recyclables valued at INR 7 (approximately USD 0.10) per kilogram a day. Annually over 4,000 metric tons are recycled due to these facilities and the monetary benefits to waste pickers is over INR 2,50,00,000 INR (approximately USD 337,800).

INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS

The collaboration between the 3D Program, KKP KP, SWaCH and CEE created unique opportunities to converge the expertise and resources of each partner to advance a shared commitment to women's empowerment. With a focus on a marginalized group of women facing multiple vulnerabilities, the partnership made progress to improve or create systems to address the needs of waste pickers and their families, while holding government and other stakeholders accountable for their economic and social inclusion. Most gratifyingly, this was done against the backdrop of the collective action of waste pickers themselves, organized over the past two decades by KKP KP and SWaCH, demonstrating the power of that action and the leadership of waste pickers in speaking for and organizing themselves.



Together, the partners aimed to demonstrate the value of convergent action to address the needs of a group of particularly vulnerable women. Our methodology focused on breaking down the silos that thematic sectors and public and private stakeholders typically occupy to address waste pickers' needs. By building on the strength of their collective action and technical expertise, the partners ensured that all interventions were informed by waste pickers themselves and were designed to facilitate their economic empowerment and reduce the multiple barriers they, their families and other informal workers face in accessing economic opportunities and the social welfare programs they are entitled to.

As an external partner based at an international organization, the 3D Program played a facilitative role in linking stakeholders across sectors, providing opportunities to amplify the voices of waste pickers and their advocates, and identifying and securing financial and other resources. The 3D Program team understood that the technical expertise and the prioritization of activities lay with the local partners and the waste pickers themselves. Following their lead, the Program was uniquely positioned to leverage their work and capacity to maximize impact by catalyzing or reinvigorating processes that may have stalled, identifying unlikely partnerships, resources and opportunities, and providing an additional global platform through which to communicate developments and document lessons learned and achievements. The 3D Program's focus on girls' and women's empowerment helped to link the program to global advocacy on gender equality, women's leadership and collective action.

In Pune, over the four-year period (2017-2021), the 3D Program brought together mass-based organizations of waste pickers and other civil society organizations, corporate entities and government officials, , exploring new ways to collaborate, rekindling previous partnerships, initiating new experiments, and attempting to structure and institutionalize them within the municipal and PSCDCL framework. The institutional framework of the Working Group would have been the legacy of the first phase of the program if not for the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this did not come to fruition in the expected time frame, all the other relationships were firmly cemented over the course of the program.



SWaCH members (left to right) Lata Ashok Adagale, Rekha Lahu Dubale and Manisha Ramesh Avghade at a SWaCH material recovery facility (MRF). Photo by the 3D Program.

Additionally, the advocacy conducted during the partnership solidified the recognition of the need and value of sustained and formalized engagement of the PMC with waste pickers and their representatives, as articulated unequivocally by municipal and PSCDCL officials over the four-year period. This goes beyond the recognition and role of SWaCH as the waste picker cooperative offering front-end waste management services to the city and embeds a fundamental acceptance that waste pickers need to be recognized as leaders and experts to be consulted and engaged with and represented in SWM systems. Although the unparalleled frequency of transfers of municipal officials derailed some important timelines and project deliverables, the program ensured that a wider array of officials understood the informal sector's contribution to SWM, and the tremendous financial, environmental, social potential that their inclusion offers to a city.



Although SWaCH was already in a formal relationship with the PMC, and KKPKP had a long history of association and negotiation with the PMC, the collaboration with the 3D Program created an opportunity for the PMC to reexamine the nature of these partnerships and the need to consider waste pickers and their representatives as key players in the city's landscape. The partnership created spaces to highlight the endorsement of the role of waste pickers by senior administrators and bureaucrats in a non-threatening, inclusive and participatory way. The need for convergence and capacity building within municipal systems and structures was evident, without needing to be articulated acrimoniously. Across the board, senior officials acknowledged the need and value of inputs from SWaCH and KKPKP in planning and implementing both SWM and social welfare systems.

The process confirmed that government is an essential partner to scale-up and sustain the livelihoods and social inclusion of waste pickers. However, the frequent political and administrative transfers of government officials, many of whom became champions of waste pickers, slow down and sometimes halt progress, until the next round of transfers. The lesson learned is that the proposed model and this kind of advocacy and activism requires time, resources, patience, political acumen, sustained vigilance, and ongoing negotiating based on data to protect waste pickers, whose position remains tenuous, despite their considerable expertise and contributions to the city of Pune.

An additional challenge lies in the tension between the flexibility that informal work provides that waste pickers value and the need for a more reliable source of income. The zero-waste model allows waste pickers to consolidate their position as an integral part of the government SWM system, without requiring them to become municipal employees. In fact, the need for systematic, long-term investment in strengthening the informal sector, creating parallel revenue streams for SWaCH, and running a model that functions independent of both political interference and the goodwill of well-meaning bureaucrats was repeatedly articulated by municipal and state government officials. Officials acknowledged that the municipal investment in SWaCH is a fraction of what the government would pay if SWM was contracted out to private contractors, and it generates far greater returns. Yet, there seems to be little consistent political support to institutionalize SWaCH within the SWM



system of the PMC. Further, there was unanimous recognition that in the absence of clear directives for higher budgetary allocations for SWaCH operations (such as digital outreach, state of the art data management systems, technical innovation, and higher quality equipment), corporate funds would need to fill the gaps. This reality is testimony to the urgent need for diverse sources of support for alternative, decentralized, inclusive SWM models, such as the zero-waste model, that are less mainstream but more robust and replicable.

Civil society and corporate partnerships, some of which existed prior to the 3D Program collaboration, were re-energized due to increased interactions during program implementation and the design of the formal platform of the Working Group. This created a richer landscape against which experimentation with government support could be explored. These partnerships were also leveraged for meaningful advocacy during the COVID-19 pandemic, when public systems struggled and failed the most vulnerable. A rich network of organizations including informal sector trade unions, NGOs beyond the primary partners, cooperatives, environmental groups and philanthropies came together, against and with the PMC as required, in the fight against COVID-19. Information flows, grievance redress and support distribution strategies were jointly and openly contested and shared, and the need to collaborate was felt more than ever. This concerted action across the city's civil society and corporate organizations resulted in prudent and focused activities to systematically allocate resources to reach the most marginalized and excluded.

Looking back over the four years, it is clear that while considerable progress was made towards achieving the objectives of the partnership between the 3D Program, KKP KP, SWaCH and CEE, the basic limitations of a large, slow, lumberous democracy in action, combined with the global pandemic, led to delays in some areas. These can be overcome only through more active, intense and longer term sustained engagement, that goes beyond the framework of the original four-year project timeline. Looking to the future, the Pune-based partners will continue to work toward the three objectives, including convening the Working Group once possible, and sustainably scaling-up the program, including exploring applications to other groups of women informal workers. In 2021, the 3D Program will close its US-based operations and hand over



to the partners in Pune, providing support to strategically plan for the scaling-up of the program and assist with fundraising. The four-year partnership has paved the way for robust, sustainable, local collaborations that simultaneously engage with the government while advocating for its accountability. Through the program activities, the partnership has laid the foundation for systemic change that will move women waste pickers from a place of economic vulnerability and social marginalization to secure their place as leaders and experts in the provision of an essential service for the citizens of Pune.



APPENDIX 1

Working Group on Solid Waste Management and Social Inclusion (Working Group) Working Terms of Reference

Purpose: The Working Group will provide full time advisory and implementation monitoring support to the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) Solid Waste Management (SWM) Department and the PMC Social Development Department (SDD) (as relevant to the scope of work), with guidance from the Program Advisory Committee (PAC) of the 3D Program for Girls and Women at the United Nations Foundation.

Leadership: The Working Group will be chaired by the PMC Municipal Commissioner/Additional Municipal Commissioner with the Joint Commissioner, SWM as Member Secretary.

Proposed Membership: Members will include:

- From the PMC – Deputy Commissioner, SWM; Head of SDD; Vehicle Depot in-charge, Chief Sanitary Inspector(s); PMC IT Department; Public Relations Officer, Law Officer
- Other proposed members: 3D Program, Centre for Environment Education (CEE), Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), Kashtakari Panchayat, SWaCH, Leadership For Equity, tech/data partners (TCS, Re-City, Recykal, etc.) and technical experts.

Term: To be determined once the Working Group is convened, post-COVID

Scope of Work:

1. Conceptualize and update existing Pune City SWM plan, based on assessment of current SWM situation, infrastructure, processing technologies, etc.
2. Draft short/mid/long-term goals and implementation strategy of SWM, including:
 - a) Zero-waste – plans and policies
 - b) Data mapping and management
 - c) 100% door-to-door collection – upgrade plan for existing model
 - d) 100% segregation – monitoring & enforcement plan
 - e) Timely, coordinated secondary collection, transfer and tertiary transport
 - f) Creating linkages for other types of waste (garden waste, biomedical waste, e-waste, sanitary waste, bulky waste)
 - g) Land use and allocation for decentralized management
 - h) Removal of all containers and chronic spots
 - i) Information, Education, Communication (IEC) and Citizen Engagement Plan
 - j) Convergence of extended producer responsibility (EPR) activities into a single consolidated plan
 - k) Convergence of various SWM projects, including low value plastic collection, cleanliness drives, HDPE plastic to filaments etc.
 - l) Swach Bharat Survekshan – data management and MIS, other targets
3. Facilitate capacity building of PMC staff in SWM and SDD
4. Rework SWM bylaws if necessary and draft changes to other regulations (Development Control Rule, Energy, City composting, etc.)
5. Develop a city-level Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Environmental Responsibility (CER) strategy for SWM and SDD pertinent to the above scope
6. Create and engage a consortium of corporate donors (such as Tata Trust, ISWF, UNF, UNDP, JBVS, Yardi, ITC, APCCI, Cummins)
7. Facilitate the inclusion of waste pickers into existing schemes of the PMC and identify new schemes that could be beneficial to waste pickers and their families

Resources:

- Full-time staff (new and existing) for data, planning outreach, operations, workers benefits, governance; and part-time staff (new and existing) for wet waste management (composting, bio-digestion), legal, financial
- Financial support for deployment of external full-time and part-time resources will be raised jointly, with the 3D Program taking the lead, subject to the Working Group being empowered by the PMC to take up the above mandate

3D Program Advisory Committee



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Partnerships lie at the heart of the 3D Program.
We are grateful for the support we receive from
our partners to help us advance our work.

International Center for Research on Women (ICRW)
Pune Zilla Parishad • Pune Municipal Corporation
Maharashtra State Road Transport Corporation (MSRTC)
Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal (MASUM) • Sangini
Chaitanya • Maharashtra Village Social Transformation Foundation (VSTF)
Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) • SWaCH
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