

Garbage in, garbage all around

By Ashok Dash

Garbage has become a serious problem around the world in urban centers and in rural areas. In a report published in the journal, *Nature*, the problem of garbage and solid waste is described as “assuming terrible proportions.” Global garbage collection is predicted to triple to 11 million tons per day by the end of this century.¹ Millions of tons of garbage in India is left untreated and improperly disposed of by civic agencies. As the waste collected in dumpsites continues to rot, spread foul odors and causes air pollution and health risks to those in the surrounding areas.

Village Baas Khusla in the Gurugram district of Haryana, struggled with, but overcame, open garbage dumping and the associated health and hygiene problems in the village. Influenced by industrialization in the neighboring area, the village is home to thousands of migrants who have chosen to live here for their livelihood. Huge population density offers a favorable scope for business ranging from vegetable shops, juice shops, eateries, garment shops, and saloons, etc. Most of these business units belong to migrants because the original inhabitants shifted to nearby cities. These factors have caused critical sanitation issues. Raj Kumar Chouhan, ward panch, says, “Industrialization in the area has offered us both happiness and miseries in one basket.”

Under the project, *Swacchata Hai to Swasthya Hai* (cleanliness and hygiene is health), Sehgal Foundation and Maruti Suzuki India Ltd (MSIL) collaborated to bring community ownership for the infrastructure improvements MSIL created to solve these problems in Baas Khusla. MSIL constructed essential sanitation facilities in the village and provided housekeeping personnel to maintain sanitation and cleanliness. However, the *panchayat* and community members did not come forward to take ownership of the improvements undertaken by MSIL.

Villagers’ efforts lead to land allocation for garbage collection

A big cause of worry for people in village Baas Khusla was a huge open garbage dump on one side of the village that posed health and hygiene hazards along the road. Many villagers suffered from skin and respiratory diseases due to the unhygienic environment. They found it difficult to cross the road due to the foul smell and filth all around, but still the *panchayat* and the community were not willing to address this problem. Due to lack of a closed dumping site, the garbage kept on accumulating in the open and spread on the roads.

To address this, the Sehgal Foundation team organized sanitation campaigns with students, shopkeepers, and ward committees to sensitize them to stop throwing the garbage on roads. Frequent meetings were held with the *sarpanch*, ward *panchs*,

¹ See <http://www.indiacelebrating.com/environmental-issues/garbage-pollution/>.

and key members to look at possible solutions to the issue. Community members realized that there was a need for a designated garbage-dumping zone, and they approached the panchayat to allot land for that purpose. However, the panchayat did not have requisite land for this purpose. The Sehgal Foundation team counseled key members of the panchayat and motivated them to submit an application to the Haryana State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (HSIIDC), Manesar, for an allotment of the required land.



Local villagers and HSIIDC officials identifying the site for garbage disposal

The villagers were initially apprehensive and said that finding time to pursue this cause would be too difficult and HSIIDC would not allot any land for garbage dumping. However, with continuous motivation, they decided to try it. The villagers, sarpanch, ward panch, and key members met with HSIIDC officials and followed up on their request for allotment of land for the dumping site. Their efforts finally yielded results and HSIIDC allotted land for garbage dumping.

Mobilization of panchayat for funding trolleys

The problem of garbage dumping was a huge issue in this village, but the panchayat was not taking any initiative to address the issue. The Sehgal Foundation team organized several meetings with senior citizens, the women's club, the *sarpanch*, and ward *panchs* to try to resolve the garbage dumping issues on the roads and public places, as it made life so difficult for everyone. However, the panchayat expected MSIL to provide the solution because they had undertaken

many infrastructure works in this village. The community expected them to resolve the garbage problem too.

The Sehgal Foundation team was committed to mobilizing the panchayat to find a solution and continued to engage with its members to address the problem. Finally, in a joint meeting of sarpanch, ward panch, key members, and the women's club, the sarpanch offered a solution and willingness to purchase some trolleys for garbage dumping. Attendees accepted the proposal. Within a few days, the panchayat purchased four trolleys costing 2.5 lakhs. Now the community uses these trolleys for garbage removal, making their streets clean.

With the active support of the panchayat, the village now has a designated place for garbage dumping. This has improved the surroundings, and the village roads remain clean.

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