

Report on ID card camps for Waste Pickers (August 2015)

Background

In a meeting in November 2014, the Initiative on Waste, Informal Workers and Chennai's Future along with its partner organizations submitted a strategy paper on the need for issuing occupational ID cards to the waste pickers in the city, and how this could be done, to the Commissioner of the Corporation of Chennai (CoC). At the meeting the Commissioner agreed that there was a need for the same and said that the CoC would implement the strategy paper. In keeping with the promise the Commissioner to issue ID cards to waste pickers in the city at the earliest, the CoC in July 2015 acted on the strategy paper and organized camps at Perungudi and Kodungaiyur dumping yards.

The camps were conducted over a duration of three days each at Perungudi from 15th to 17th of July 2015 and Kodungaiyur from 20th to 22nd of July 2015. There were also health camps organized by the Corporation alongside the ID card camps. A total of 975 waste pickers from across Chennai registered for ID cards and benefited from the health camps at both the camp sites.

The process

Citizen consumer and civic Action Group, which anchors the Initiative, provided considerable support to the CoC in planning for the camps. Our emphasis was on maximum registration without compromising on the quality of the data collected. Anticipating a decent turnout of waste pickers from across the city and to ensure that no waste picker faced any ordeal during the camps, the CAG team along with the staff from the Corporation worked out a systematic plan. We decided on a token system for registering waste pickers on a first-come, first-served basis. The number of tokens to be issued per day was capped at 200 at the direction of the Corporation and it was targeted to register 600 waste pickers at each of the two camps. There were 7 tables arranged for registering the waste pickers and each table had a surveyor (engaged by the CoC) with an Android Tablet to collect the basic information required for the ID cards and an NGO representative to provide a reference to each waste picker. There were also 3 photographers to get the waste pickers photographed just after they completed the registration forms. The photographers used tablets with a simple ODK form that allowed us to correlate the photos with the registration information of each waste picker. The following is a gist of the process followed during the camps:

- As the waste pickers entered the venue they were requested to go for the health camps first.
- After the health check-up, the waste pickers were issued a token each and were guided to the surveyors where basic information for the ID card was collected.
- After completing the basic registration, the waste pickers were guided to the photographers, where they were asked for their token number and their photograph was taken.
- After that, at the exit desk, the signatures/thumb impressions of the waste pickers were taken confirming that the information they have given is true to the best of their knowledge.
- Lastly, the exit desk issued them an acknowledgement slip which they were asked to retain and bring at the time of collecting their ID cards.

In addition, as part of this exercise a detailed survey was administered to approximately 35 percent of the waste pickers who participated in the camps, with the help of our volunteers, CBO partners and CAG team members. This was to collect socio-economic information about the waste pickers that would be useful in designing targeted welfare interventions.

Thus the CAG staff and volunteers worked alongside CoC staff and facilitated the process at every step, ensuring that no waste picker faced any hassle in completing the process.

Response from waste pickers

The 3 days of camp at each location viz. Perungudi and Kodungaiyur dumping yards had witnessed the participation of 975 waste pickers of which there were 419 men, 554 women and 2 persons of other sex. At Perungudi, 546 waste pickers were registered. The Kodungaiyur camp witnessed 443 registrations. Since the camps were organized near the dumping yards there was maximum participation from waste pickers who work inside the dumping yards. But thanks to the intensive outreach activities organized by CAG staff and partner organizations there were also a good number of waste pickers from areas like Thiruvanmiyur, Anna Nagar, Sholinganallur and Washermenpet who came for registration at both the camp venues. It was palpable that the waste pickers took part in the camps with great hope and enthusiasm. The tremendous response of the waste pickers also underscored their felt need to get the occupational ID cards that would enable them to continue earning their livelihood without harassment.

Role of CAG and its partners

Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) along with its partner organizations – Pennurimai Iyakkam, Thozhamai, Arunodhaya, Real Charitable Trust and Chennai Metro Workers Union played a pivotal role in organizing these ID card camps with the Corporation of Chennai successfully. It is worth mentioning that for the first time the Corporation deployed technology at a large scale for a registration process of this nature, with the use of Android Tablets and ODK forms to collect information from the waste pickers and to take their photographs. The CAG team with its expertise in these areas had designed the ODK forms for the survey and also trained 10 surveyors deputed for the camps by the Corporation of Chennai to use the tablets and administer the surveys to the waste pickers. In addition to this, CAG with support from its staff, volunteers and staff from partner organizations, was able to ensure that there was enough manpower to conduct surveys and manage the crowd at the camp venues and also to ensure that all logistics were in place beforehand. The staff of the Corporation from the SWM department, the dump yards and the EDP cell also coordinated well with the CAG team, and this can be seen as an example of a successful partnership between civil society and government.

CAG, and especially our partners, had carried out extensive outreach and mobilization activities in and around the settlements of waste pickers both prior to and during the camp dates so as to maximize the turnout of waste pickers. CAG also helped the Corporation of Chennai in designing the fliers and the template for the ID cards. The Corporation of Chennai printed the fliers for outreach purposes. CAG made additional copies of the fliers and distributed to the partner organizations and to the communities.

Way forward:

On 17th July 2015, which was also the last day of the camp at Perungudi, the Honorable Mayor of the Corporation of Chennai visited the camp site and participated in a small event where he distributed the ID cards to 20 waste pickers as a precursor to the issuance of similar ID cards to waste pickers in all zones from across the city. On the same day the CAG team identified that the template of the ID cards issued to the waste pickers were not the ones that were originally agreed on. Instead it had been modified into what was effectively a gate pass to enter the dumping yards. The CAG team drew the attention of the Mayor to the discrepancy who listened patiently and promised to rectify it immediately. The CAG team also followed up with the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner (Health) and Superintendent Engineer – SWM to ensure that the discrepancy in the ID card template is rectified and ID cards are distributed to the registered waste pickers within the agreed timeframe of 90 days. The CAG team is currently working on examining and cleaning the data collected and will share the data with the CoC for printing the ID cards as soon as this process gets over. CAG has also extended its support to the CoC for the distribution of ID cards so as to ensure that the ID cards reach to all the eligible waste pickers who were registered during the camps. The CoC has promised to organize similar camps in other zones in the near future to register waste pickers from other parts of the city who were not covered in these two camps.

Thus the coordinated effort of the Corporation, CAG and all the partner organizations and the volunteers had ensured that the 3 days of camp each at Perungudi and Kodungaiyur were successful in terms of the number of waste pickers who came for registration and also in the management and conduct of the camps. The imminent issuance of occupational ID cards to all the waste pickers registered through these two camps and the Corporation's commitment to hold similar camps in all other zones to cover the entire city would go a long way in recognising the contribution of the waste pickers to the city and the environment and securing their livelihoods.

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Photograph 1: Enthusiastic waste pickers queued up for registration at the camp site in Perungudi on Day 1



Photograph 2: Annie, Researcher at CAG administering the socio-economic survey on Day 1 of the Kodungaiyur camp



Photograph 3: Waste pickers being photographed for ID cards at the Perungudi camp on Day 2



Photograph 4: CAG Team interacting with the waste pickers at the exit desk on Day 1 at Perungudi



Photograph 5: The Honourable Mayor visits the camp at Perungudi on Day 3: CAG and its partner organizations highlighting to him a major discrepancy in the ID cards printed by CoC