



Assessment of Socio and Economic Status of Waste Pickers in Ahmedabad

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Abstract

Over past few decades of growth in population and economy has led to rise of middle-class consumer culture in Gujarat and have also brought increasing amounts of solid waste to its urban areas. Though innovations in consumer products have brought great convenience and sanitation in people's lives but on other hand it has increased the amount of trash to many folds. Increase in the waste pile at dump-site is going to continue further and major part of it will come from the urban users. This paper discusses the socio and economic contribution of informal waste pickers of Ahmedabad. This paper also states the solid waste management done by the waste pickers and their livelihood pattern. The study is conducted at Ahmedabad as it has been one of the leading growing urban areas of Gujarat and it is becoming more integrated into global economy. Such rapid growth demands more concerns about balanced development integrating economy, environment and people.

Key Words: Livelihoods, innovation, waste pickers, solid waste

INTRODUCTION

Informal sector activities are widespread across the Globe and waste pickers are a major part of the informal sector. This occupation of waste pickers has taken new way in terms of livelihood. Every city has distinguished population that makes a living by recycling the waste. As the cities developed, more and more infrastructures are placed, the amount of waste generated is increasing at a high pace. Here, Waste pickers play an important, but usually unrecognized role in the waste management system of cities. They collect waste in search of recyclable items that can be sold to scrap merchant which is their only source of livelihood.

Rag picking entails the collecting, sorting and selling of various waste materials that can be found at dumpsites, riverbanks, street corners, or in residential areas, and consist primarily of plastics, bottles, cardboard, hair, iron, polythene bags and miscellaneous. This activity requires no skills and is one of the sources of income for urban poor. They are the most disadvantaged, vulnerable and underprivileged class in the urban labour market, occupying the lowest rung of the poverty groups. Considering environment and social aspect of development, solid waste has emerged as one the most important concerned of urban development.

The collection and treatment of waste in Indian cities is very complex and variable, rapid growth of cities make urban governance bodies struggle to set up single system to cover all aspects of solid waste management since activities related to waste span over wide range of stake holders. However, from all people dealing with waste, perhaps waste pickers are the most invisible or ignorant part of pyramid. Out of total generated waste, municipality collects 35-60% waste and around 15-20% of waste is collected by waste pickers.

Waste pickers are mostly women who come from the most marginalized groups of the population and often live in unauthorized slums. It has been observed that Waste pickers are mostly migrants who had fled from their village in search of jobs. These Waste pickers are actually serving the civilization and while working for their survival they clean the streets.

This informal sector works as the back-bone to the organized waste collection sector and thousands of families are also dependent on it for livelihood. Waste recycling sector comprises of waste collectors, waste buyers and waste recyclers. It is also a secondary occupation for some families. This population is ascribed the lowest status among the urban poor. They roam the streets on foot looking for waste, which they put inside the sack they carry. They

walk kilometres every single day to collect the waste. After the collections for the day, they sort the materials and sell them to traders. The rates they get for these waste are very low.

The study aims to identify the following points:

- Identification of major clusters of waste pickers in Ahmedabad and prepare GPS map
- Assessment of the socio-economic status of the waste pickers

METHODOLOGY

Major section of this study is based on ground reality by collecting data through primary household survey and focused group discussion. Entire study is divided in major 3 phases.

- Phase I: Waste pickers cluster identification (Residence and working both) and cluster profiling
- Phase II: Selection of cluster / Household for primary survey and carrying out primary survey
- Phase III: Data analysis and data assessment

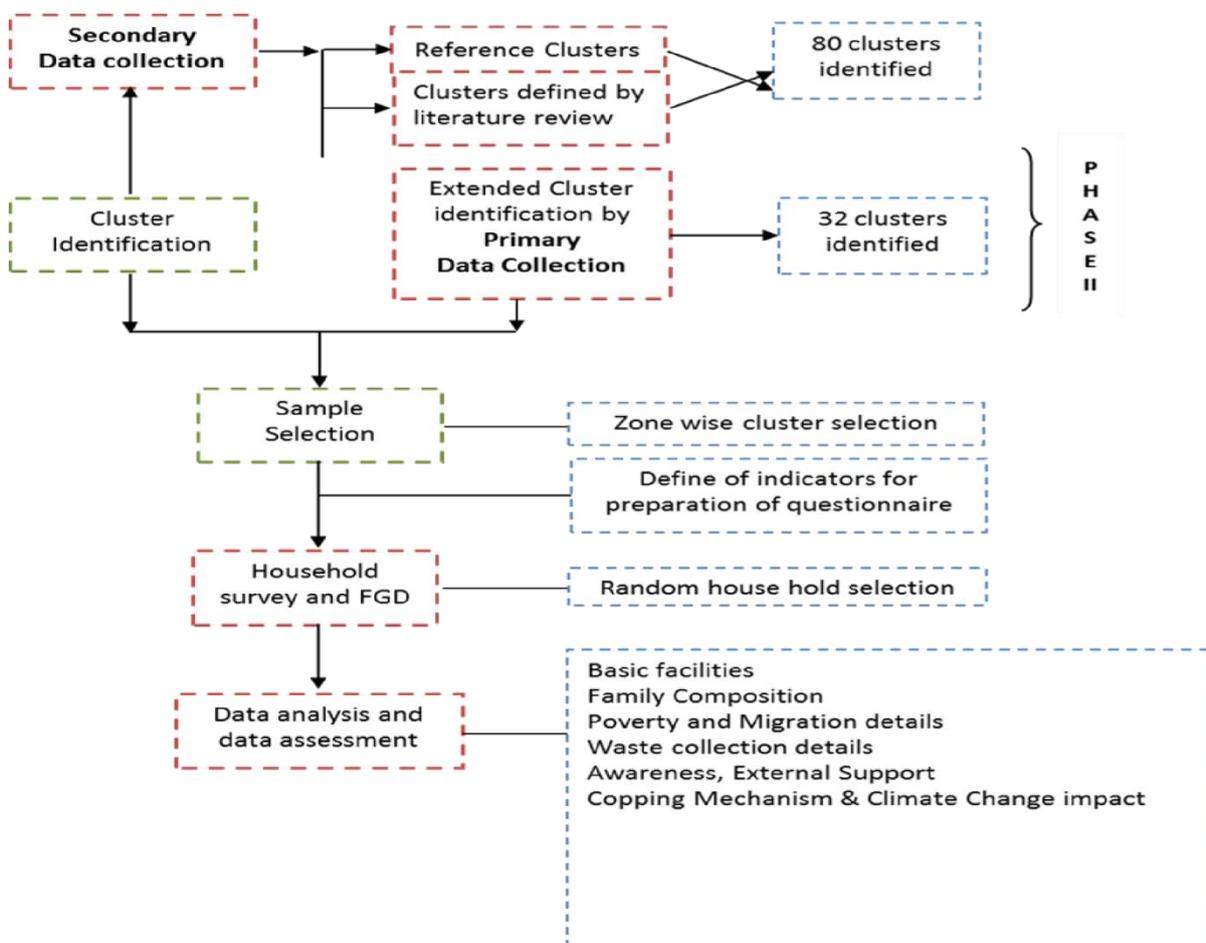


Figure 1: conceptual framework

Cluster Identification

Two way approach has taken up for cluster identification: 1) first 38 cluster have been identified through various literatures, papers, articles, case studies and consultation with Waste markets and retailers. 2) Reconnaissance survey has been done within identified cluster of waste pickers and in major wards of Ahmedabad containing large slum clusters. During a second round roughly 32 additional clusters have been identified. In total there were 44 areas with 70 clusters.

Selection of clusters & carrying out primary survey

Detailed questionnaires and Focused Group Discussion (FGD) tools have been prepared to collect comprehensive information on waste pickers. The questionnaire included information about availability of basic Household

amenities, their living condition, Migration details, and equipment for work, working hours, and postures at work, health and safety issues. Collectively, the focus groups and questionnaires, consisting both open and close ended questions, provide data on the context within which informal workers earn their livelihoods and the forces that impact, both positively and negatively, on workers' incomes and working condition.

Total 70 clusters of waste pickers have been identified in Ahmedabad city (including AMC and AUDA) boundary, from which 32 clusters have been selected for carrying out primary survey. Clusters were selected based on various zone of city (in six zones: Central, North, South, East, West and New west), where these clusters are uniformly distributed in all these six zones covering residential, Commercial and industrial areas inside and outside AMC and AUDA boundary.

From the total 70 clusters, 313 household have been surveyed and 37 Focus group discussions were conducted to meet the objectives of the study where selection of Household was randomly done. Workers on site were also interviewed to observe their working and living condition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The nature of this study is not entirely qualitative or quantitative, but mixtures of both types of questions were added in survey analysis to understand the overall structures of this occupation.

First of all the major clusters were identified and noted. According to secondary survey, waste picking is highly spared out and informal sector which is not covered in census survey. Thus many clusters remained unidentified or hidden. But during primary survey, waste pickers living in both the settlement areas, within slum and outside the slum were recognized. The slum category consists of slums, ghettos, chawls etc. which are formally identified by the Municipal Corporation or government. These slums are located in the fringes and remote patches of the cities.

On the other hand, outside slums, are those slums which are built on government land, abandoned land, or on road/foot path etc. These slums are not permanent since waste pickers living on footpath, road, abandoned land keep changing their places ever 2-3 days.

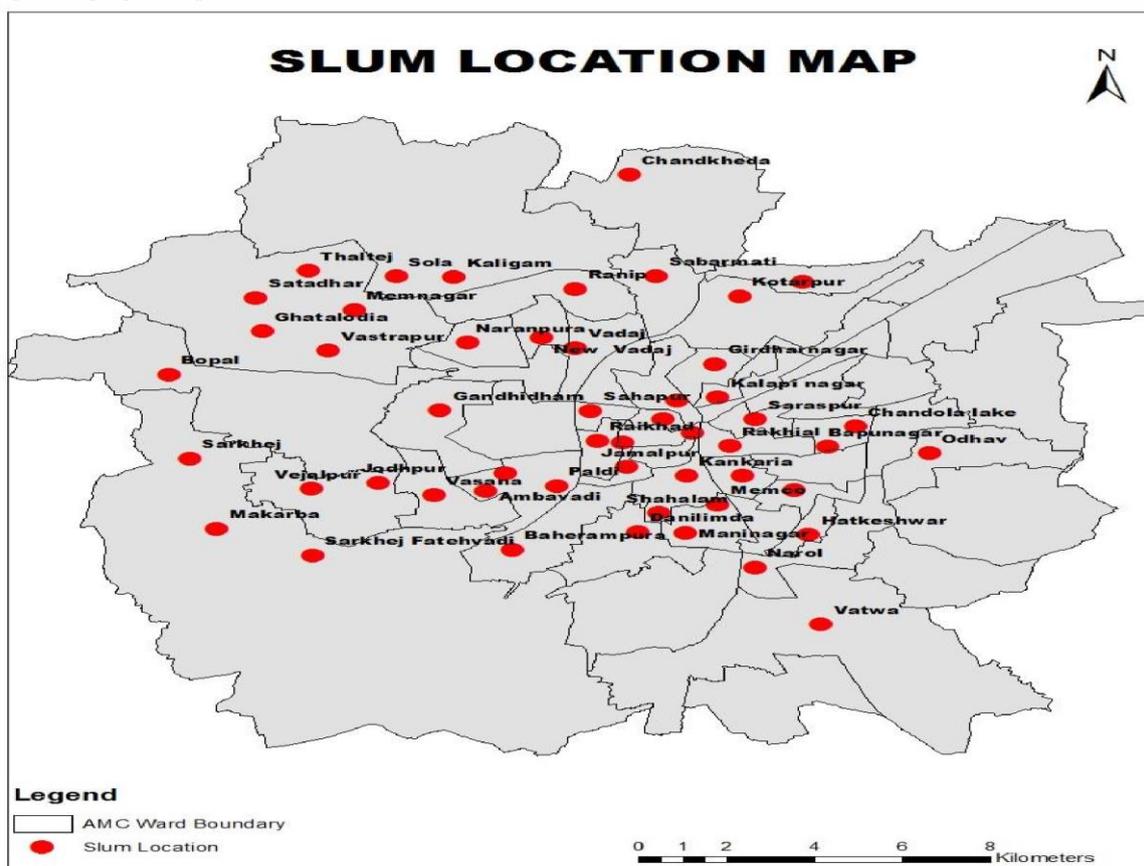


Figure 2: GPS map of Slum Location

The above GPS map illustrates the geographical distribution of clusters where waste-picker population is found. The mapping of areas are done zone wise from AMC limits whereas AUDA has not classified areas in zones since areas under AUDA limits are still developing.

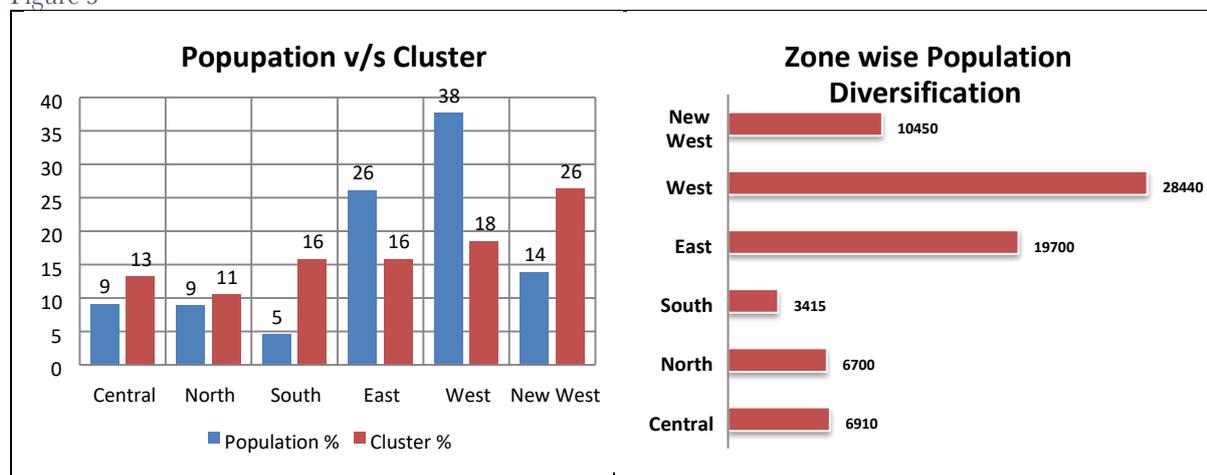


By far, there are total 6 zones situated in the limits of AMC where the population of waste pickers resides. Out of which, 69 clusters were chosen from both AMC & AUDA zones for sample survey to understand the demographic characteristics of waste-pickers. From the analysis, it was found that 10 major clusters (as per table 1) were sheltering highest numbers of waste-pickers from the sample clusters. These clusters include areas of Vadaj, Ambawadi, Odhav, Hatkeshwar, Rajpur, Shah-E-Alam, Meghaninagar, Dariyapur, Vejalpur, Girdharnagar, Vastrapur, Memco, Memnagar and Rakhiyal. Highest households engaged into waste picking occupation were reported from these clusters.

Area Name	Cluster Name	Total Waste pickers
Vadaj	Ramapir no tekro	20000
Ambawadi	Mehnatpura	5000
Odhav	Indira Nagar - 2, Bhavaninagar no tekro	5000
Hatkeshwar	Labunglow naa chhapra	5000
Rajpur	Nagori ni chali	4500
Shah e Alam	Labab Nagar	3000
Meghaninagar	Chamundanagar	3000
Dariyapur	Laxmichand ghanchi ni chali	3000
Vejalpur	But Bhavani naa chhapra (Talavdi Chhapra)	2500
Girdharnagar	Makubhai ni chali	2500
Dariyapur	Ghanchi ni chawl	2200
Vastrapur	Gokul Nagar na chhapra	2200
Memco	Shakti Nagar	2000
Memnagar	Valinath chawk	2000
Rakhiyal	Nagori ni chali	1500

Table 1: Top ten dense clusters

Figure 3



: zone wise population diversification

From the above graph it can be observed that the highest surveyed clusters are from New West zone but the population density is less compared to other zone. One of the probable reasons for it is because the New West zone is still developing and the number of population residing there is very less compared to other zones. Highest population waste picker is recorded in West zone which is by large a residential and commercial area, from where second highest sample clusters were found. East zone, which is industrial area, has recorded second highest population. Since it is an industrial area, availability of land is very less to cater to residential population which explains the lesser number of clusters. Moreover, the congestion of labour and waste pickers will remain very high in these areas due to ample opportunities of employment there. Central zone have the same characteristic but the number of industrial establishment are lesser compared to the East zone thus the number of clusters and



population is lesser here. Whereas South zone is a mixture of industrial and residential areas where the numbers of clusters are high but the population of waste pickers is lesser.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Educate children: Female respondents engaged in this occupation reported that there has been increase in their income which has enabled them to educate their children. Some of them have also sent their children for higher secondary and college education.

Women upliftment: This occupation is dominated by female workers and un-skilled and un-trained women can also opt for this occupation. Since this is not a time bound and organized occupation, they can work independently and also handle domestic and social responsibilities. And as they started earning, their reputation has also increased in family as well as in their respective communities.

Basic amenities: It is a secondary occupation for many respondents, which has added an extra source of income to their home. And that income has helped them in fulfilling basic amenities and uplifting their life-style.

Liberty: Waste pickers; generally work independently and according to their suitable time. They do not get orders from others. And, that is why female members are more engaged into this occupation.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Daily income: Around 17% of waste pickers, get money on daily basis from this occupation, so it becomes easy for them to fulfill their basic necessity. Majority population admitted that daily income from this occupation is very much important for them to get meal twice a day.

Savings and Economic security: This occupation has resulted in increased livelihood. Thus after spending money on their daily and domestic needs, they are now able to save money. And their money borrowing has substantially reduced. Even in some clusters they got financial help from NGOs who helped them to open accounts in banks as well as get loans at lower rates.

Occupational diversification: Waste picking is the independent occupation; workers engaged in this occupation can also opt for more than one occupation. We found during survey that there are workers who are engaged in three different occupations at once.

OBSERVATION

Throughout this study, many aspects and information was compiled which played an important role in developing the interpretation of various factors affecting waste picking occupation, the inter-relationship and resulting vulnerability of people engaged in it. That led us to the major findings of the study which are explained below:

One of the major problem waste pickers follow across Ahmedabad that they are not allowed to collect waste from residential societies and areas, due to lack of trust on them. These areas are the primary source of waste generation. Thus, if recyclable waste is segregated or collected separately from the source point itself then it becomes very easy for both waste picker and municipality to manage waste. But due to various reasons, waste pickers are not allowed to enter in societies and thus it increases their burden to commute more to collect waste.

Waste pickers living in notified slums have developed a network to run the occupation efficiently. That includes place and facility for segregation and storage to identification of most profitable scrap buyers' shops. Moreover, their social network in slum area is very strong as many communities live in one densely located slum. That gives them advantage to seek help from other when needed. On the other hand, waste pickers living on street side or on open land/temporary shelter areas have to struggle the most since they do not have any facility for segregation and storage of waste. In addition to that, their areas for waste picking and selling are not fixed. For an individual, there are many reasons which, individually or together, compel him/her to join the waste picking occupation. Most observed combination of reasons to join the waste picking occupation is lack of other opportunities available, no skill and capital requirement and daily earning/cash. These reasons together, or sometimes solely, drag people in waste picking. In most of the cases, there is a chance of cause of health hazards to waste pickers. Lack of precautionary safety measures and lack of awareness regarding health were the main causes of health diseases. Waste pickers did not take care of their health because of ignorance and poverty. Hazardous working conditions lead to frequent injury in the form of cuts and bruises from glass, metal sharps, and broken bottles etc. From total, 41% of respondents were satisfied and 27% respondents were more or less satisfied with the waste picking occupation and earnings from it. Many respondents selected this occupation by choice not by force. Thus, this indicates that this occupation might have been an option enforced onto people engaged in it but we cannot be totally judgmental about it since it has other aspects as well.



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