

# Sign up to make Bangalore a Waste-less City

It is a disturbing indicator of the disconnect between people of Bangalore and civic agencies that an article on the prevailing garbage (mis)management in *New York Times* does more to alert authorities to a crisis, than does protests of rural communities against dumping of about 50,00,000 kilogrammes of the city's 'waste' daily on their fields, forests, grazing pastures, canals, tanks, etc. Clearly, villagers aren't willing to take any more of this attack on their Fundamental Right to Life and to a Clean Environment resulting in garbage piling up on the streets, possibly threatening the outbreak of an epidemic. This situation would never have occurred if the Government genuinely involved the public in decision making and ensured appropriate planning and management of the municipal solid waste stream. The only *auspicious* occasion for such beginnings is NOW, else it will be NEVER.



The current crisis is also a direct consequence of a crore (10 million) people behaving with an “out of sight, out of mind” approach when disposing their waste. Villagers around Bangalore don't generate waste and yet have borne with extraordinary patience the pollution of *their* lands, soil, water, air, and also the contamination of their bodies and that of their cattle, due to toxics from the city's waste. When villagers protest this attack on their Fundamental Rights, civic agencies, state government and the police have employed brute force in an attempt to crush the resistance and also fabricated false criminal charges against key leaders in a vain attempt to stymie the resistance. Meanwhile, many many promises made by various Commissioners and Mayors over the years that the damage done would be contained, victims compensated, and the villages improved, remain unfulfilled.

This situation was brought to the attention of the Karnataka High Court recently in a PIL and the Court has observed that “(t)here can be no gainsaying that the landfills are not a permanent solution”, that the “matter requires urgent decision” and that “(e)very citizen needs to be reminded that he/she has Fundamental Duties ... to keep the environment clean by ensuring waste is segregated in each household..”. (These decisions may be accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/cvqsgco> and <http://tinyurl.com/cz8tumu>.)

Appropriate technological solutions, social response strategies and necessary legal standards to tackle this problem have been around for a very long time. In fact the Municipal Solid Waste Management Rules were brought into effect by the Indian Environment Ministry 12 years ago! According to these Rules, cities are required to segregate waste at source, compost organic waste locally, ensure maximum recycling, treat biomedical and hazardous wastes carefully and only dispose inert material into scientifically designed and managed landfills. The Indian Supreme Court has supervised the evolution and enactment of these standards and keen that it must become part of ordinary municipal practices imposed December 2003 as a deadline for major cities to comply with the Rules.

Since then, many Decembers have come and gone, but civic agencies like Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP, Bangalore's civic agency) continue to violate with impunity these legal norms and judicial directives on waste management. It is this callousness that has resulted in the current *stinking* state of affairs, which, without doubt, is a shameful statement on a city that prides itself as the knowledge and IT capital of India. However, hope resurfaced when

The New York Times

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## India's Plague, Trash, Drowns Its Garden City During Strike



Kuni Takahashi for The New York Times  
A man picks up trash in a landfill on the outskirts of Bangalore that was closed after complaints about pollution. Vast mounds of garbage are scattered throughout the city.



BBMP issued a series of full page advertisements on 1<sup>st</sup> October promoting segregation of waste at source as the fundamental basis of its solid waste management effort.

**From October 1<sup>st</sup> onwards, BBMP will collect only WET and SANITARY waste DAILY**  
**DRY waste will be collected WEEKLY**

**Wet Waste**

- ❖ cooked food (veg / non-veg)
- ❖ uncooked food (veg / non-veg)
- ❖ fruit and flower waste
- ❖ fallen leaves and similar compostable materials

**Dry Waste**

- ❖ paper / plastic / wood
- ❖ metals / fabrics / cloth rags
- ❖ glass / wire / leather
- ❖ rexin / rubber
- ❖ thermocol etc...

**OUR WASTE OUR RESPONSIBILITY**

Shortlived it seems now because in a meeting held by the Chief Minister on this issue on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2012, a decision was taken to reopen landfills in Mavallipura, Mandur, Doddaballapur, etc. under police protection (a copy of this decision is attached). This has been followed by another decision in the BBMP Council on 30<sup>th</sup> October approving the purchase by a private firm of 400 acres of farm land off Bagepalli (near Chickaballapur), a full 100 kilometres from Bangalore, to set up the largest landfill ever conceived in India!



So if ever one imagined that the dumping culture was going to end soon, it seems unlikely if the BBMP has its way. Once more the Principle of Prior and Informed Consent of impacted communities has been fundamentally violated.

Another decision taken by the BBMP Council has been to scrap all garbage collection contracts and reissue new one's at whopping cost of Rs. 305 crores annually. The new contractors, reportedly, are to collect only segregated waste. But it is not at all clear how this will be achieved given our common understanding of the low levels of competence of such operators to work with communities and make this transition from a dumping-to-segregating-waste-culture happen. Could the outcome be more pollution, more protests from villagers, more of garbage piling up on the city's streets, more of the same?



We can risk waiting, or we can act now to safeguard our collective interests to ensure *Bangalore will make the transition from a waste-full city to one that is waste-less*. With this objective, ESG has put together a plan of action consisting of highly achievable and required actions that provide *short term* and *long term solutions* to help make Bangalore India's first *Waste-less* city. We request you to review this strategy and endorse it by signing the petition at this link: <http://tinyurl.com/chkc9mh>.

Please note that every time you sign, a copy of your endorsement along with the petition will reach each and every decision maker connected with the waste management stream in Bangalore.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Yours sincerely,

ESG Team

## Petition

To:

The Chief Minister of Karnataka  
Mayor and Commissioner of Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike  
Chairman, Karnataka State Pollution Control Board

Dear Sirs,

I/we write to adopt the enclosed series of actions which can ensure Bangalore transforms into a *Waste-less* city from its current status of “garbage city”.

1. **Segregate, compost, recycle:** A massive campaign approach must be immediately adopted to educate communities to segregate waste at source. Organic matter must be composted locally to the maximum extent possible. Yes it is possible to adopt very simple techniques to compost organic refuse within households, apartments, offices, etc. and thus turn what is now waste into valuable manure. This will help allow recovery of recyclable material, safe handling of hazardous waste and only inert waste may need to be land-filled. This will bring tremendously reduce the volume of waste, thus helping save valuable land, public funds now wasted on trucking waste out and protect us from pollution. Burning waste must be totally banned as it causes very serious health hazards. Businesses, institutions, households, people must be encouraged to shift away from using non-biodegradable material (Eg.: disposable plastic cups, PET bottles, thermocol, etc.). Use of cotton, paper, jute and other such biodegradable packaging material must be aggressively promoted, and become the norm for most packaging to the maximum extent possible.
2. **Campaign approach to educate people:** BBMP must immediately constitute an advisory network of not-for-profit voluntary organisations who have promoted this approach for decades and successfully demonstrated its feasibility. BBMP must also immediately fund the dissemination of excellent education material that voluntary organisations have already produced on progressive methods to resolve the waste problem and ensure that it reaches everyone across Bangalore. Students and workers from corporate bodies, industries, public institutions and volunteers must be drafted in every neighbourhood to support this campaign on lines of the successful Polio eradication and Literacy Promotion efforts.
3. **Power to the People:** Systematic, democratic and meaningful involvement of people in municipal decisions is fundamental to the success of any short term and long term solution dogging our cities. The best way to achieve this is to immediately constitute Constitutionally guaranteed Ward Committees with appropriate representation from local voluntary organisations, RWAs, schools, colleges, corporates, hotels and officiated by the Corporator and BBMP staff. For greater functionality, these Ward Committees may be further decentralised into sub-ward and street level committees to specifically find solutions to highly localised waste management problems and on a case to case basis. This method of public involvement is far more effective in dealing with the current crisis, as the norm for urban governance, and also in responding to any emergency. The current reliance on elite forums to search for solutions must be abandoned, as they are unconstitutional, undemocratic and unnecessary.
4. **Collaborate, Cooperate and Share Information:** Corporators and BBMP environmental engineers must lead, support and work with ward, sub-ward and street level committees to ensure that correct methods are employed. They must make public all information relating to waste management at the local levels, including maps, details of workforce employed, waste collection routines, contractors details, and the like. Such an exercise will help build transparency and public confidence in the overall effort. BBMP must immediately and completely share all details of waste management at the city, ward, sub-ward and street levels on its website as part of its *suo moto* information sharing obligation per the Right to Information Act, 2005.
5. **Inform and Communicate Change, All the Time:** BBMP must put out educational material and provides helplines in every *Bangalore One Centre* to assist people to understand and work with this transition to a *Waste-less City*. Progressive, responsible, considerate, socially just, ecologically sound and humane approaches must be constantly broadcast and popularised, so that they become widely practiced for the benefit of present and future generations.



6. **Pourakarmikas must be respected and rewarded:** Pourakarmikas are highly exploited and deal with our waste in the most inhumane conditions today. *This must end now.* Their health and occupational rights must be fully protected, their wages guaranteed, services professionalised, and they must become the fulcrum of solid waste management practices. The city must recognise and reward them for their unstinted efforts safeguarding our collective interests.
7. **Every street must know and manage its waste:** Decentralising garbage handling is the only way out of the current complex mess of waste accumulation. Public must be organised at highly local levels, such as the street, apartment block, etc., to develop local plans to process waste generated, including that which has accumulated in recent days. Based on public participation spaces must be identified in every ward/sub-ward for transit stations to process the waste stream, recover recyclables and remove inert and hazardous waste. Dead spaces, such as areas under HT power lines, must be identified for such activities. Where there is an acute constraint for space, such as in old neighbourhoods (Eg. Chickpet), or densely crowded and poorly planned neighbourhoods (Eg. Kumaraswamy Layout), agreements may be encouraged with space surplus wards encouraging renting of composting space.
8. **Cut down Waste Generation:** BBMP must take immediate steps to institute legal measures to cut down generation of wasteful plastics, PET bottles and thermocol materials which are major contributors to toxicity in the waste stream. Original Equipment Manufacturers must be compelled to take back waste (such as bottles, packaging material, etc). Such policies will force them to minimise packaging material, and conservation of material, energy and prevent pollution. Time tested systems of packaging groceries with paper, jute, cloth and other biodegradable and recyclable material must be encouraged and made the norm. This will minimise waste production and help create thousands of jobs in the small scale industrial sector.
9. **Incentivise Changemakers, Encourage Urban Gardening:** Those composting biodegradable waste at source must be incentivised by waiving their Solid Waste Management Cess on the recommendation of Ward/Sub-ward/Street Committees. BBMP must also actively encourage urban terrace gardening and farming, including in *Raja Kaluves* (canals which are now wrongly being cemented) and such other open spaces, on the lines of urban farming successfully practiced by people in Havana, capital of Cuba. Forest and Horticulture departments must support this urban gardening effort by providing saplings and seeds free of cost as an incentive to those who produce manure out of kitchen waste.
10. **Formalise Livelihoods of Waste-pickers:** Informal waste pickers provide tremendous service to society by recovering value out of waste. Ward, sub-ward and street committees must be encouraged to integrate them into waste stream management, thus enabling their safe livelihood options.
11. **Penalise the Big Polluters first:** BBMP must penalise large waste generators (kalyana mantaps, public institutions, corporates, construction sector, etc.) who fail to comply with norms. This policy must eventually be made applicable to households and small businesses.
12. **Construction debris must be maximally reused locally:** Construction debris today forms a major bulk of the waste stream and must be reused locally for road building or earth filling where possible. Only that which cannot find any use within the city must be landfilled.
13. **Strict NO to toxic Incineration projects. Big YES to Biomethanation:** Waste to energy projects based on incineration must be banned as they are failed technologies, extremely difficult to regulate and generally promoted by profit-hungry corporations who lie about its highly toxic impacts (Eg. Highly carcinogenic dioxin pollution). Biomethanation plants must be strongly supported and setting them up at the local levels, such as in apartment blocks, public institutions, etc., must be strongly incentivised.
14. **Landfills must become a thing of the past:** Scientifically developed landfills must be available only for disposal of inert and toxic material per applicable norms. Siting such landfills must be based on deep and democratic consultation and consent of local communities, and by ensuring all health and environmental safeguards are strictly implemented. Absolutely no dumping of organic waste in landfills must be allowed, as it generates climate unfriendly methane and toxic gases, and destroys the possibility of recovering carbon as manure.