

## Rag-pickers' Profiling and Livelihood Improvement Program

A rag picker can be defined as 'an unskilled person who picks up rags from trash cans and public dumps as a means of livelihood'. Such rag pickers are frequently seen in the six municipalities falling under the project purview viz. Uttarpara-Kotrung, Konnagar, Rishra, Serampore, Baidyabati and Champdani. These people roam around the municipalities from dawn to dusk picking up waste from roadsides and garbage dumps. The rag pickers, who have mostly migrated from different places, belong to different age groups ranging between 5 years to 80 years and are mainly forced into this profession to fight against poverty to sustain themselves. People usually look down upon the rag pickers and they are often victims of social discriminations.

There is a scope of livelihood improvement of such rag pickers under Kolkata Solid Waste Management Improvement Project (KSWMIP). The Project Management Consultant (PMC) has initiated studies on options of absorbing most of the existing rag-pickers into the Solid Waste Management system to be set-up while at the same time stressing on the improvement of health and safety aspects of their jobs. For rag-pickers who cannot be absorbed into proposed system, provision for alternative livelihood through appropriate Vocational Training is being looked at. The ragpickers would be encouraged to join an **Education Program specially designed for them** so that they can get into the mainstream education process later on. Following laws of the land, no child rag-picker would be allowed to continue in the waste handling profession.

The Rag pickers **Livelihood Improvement Program** has commenced and will continue for a period of 4 years during the entire duration of the project. Improvement programs for the Rag pickers are being formulated in close coordination with the various stakeholders and the same will be implemented in the six municipalities. Subsequently the PMC would closely monitor the effectiveness of the implementation of the program and evaluate their performance.

To help the PMC formulate a holistic plan on livelihood improvement of rag pickers, the municipalities were approached to first identify the rag pickers residing in the project municipalities and then organise interactive sessions with them municipality-wise.

In the subsequent interactive sessions, the rag pickers were urged to come up on the stage and speak about their problems and aspirations. After a dialogue with the rag pickers, they were profiled using structured questionnaire. 319 rag pickers have been profiled under KSWMIP and the data is being analysed thoroughly to assist in formulating a plan for livelihood improvement of this particular class of the society. Based on these interactions certain basic findings have evolved which are as follows:

- Around 57% of the ragpickers belong within 5 – 14 yrs age group
- 100% dropouts
- Most of the ragpickers are forced into the trade due to family pressure
- Prevalent diseases include skin diseases, enteric diseases, breathing problems
- Prey to social discrimination
- Average income per day is within the range of Rs. 100- Rs. 600

Based on these interactions, the action plans for further interactions and profiling of rag pickers have been drawn up which will help in establishing a database of the concerned rag pickers and help in planning and charting out the rag picker improvement programs.

