

# Improving Services and Improving Lives: Waste-Picker Integration and Municipal Coproduction in Pune, India

by

Tamara Failor

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Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
ADVISOR

\_\_\_\_\_  
READER (optional)

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The cast of characters .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Organization of the paper .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Pune context .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 1: The story of KKPKP: The Union’s History and Accomplishments .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The organization.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Striking achievements.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The creation of the union.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Reasons for KKPKP’s early success.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Chapter 2: The Birth of SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling): An Accountable, Affordable and Equitable Waste Management Solution .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Chapter 3: Future Challenges to SWaCH: Obstacles to Sustainability .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>The continued threat of privatization .....</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Worker buy-in and innovation .....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>The need for consumer buy-in and service worker capacity building .....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Chapter 4: Conclusions .....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Interviews.....</b>	<b>75</b>

## **Introduction**

This case study focuses on two challenges of the developing world: the provision of effective and sustainable solid waste management services, and the improvement of conditions in the informal sector. Internal and structural issues typically prevent institutions in developing countries from adequately delivering basic services (Joshi, 2008). Such obstacles include corruption, a lack of adequate employee training and incentives, and the decentralization of responsibility to local government without also allocating sufficient authority (Joshi, 2008). This paper broaches both topics by examining the case of an innovative municipal solid waste management solution that integrates the lowest on the informal sector waste management hierarchy into the formal system while substantially improving their incomes and working conditions in enduring ways.

Historically, the State has been responsible for the provision of public goods and services. But since the 1980s proponents of market-based reforms have questioned the State's role as sole provider. Calling for a greater involvement of the private sector, they argue that competition will promote service efficiency (see the New Public Management literature, especially Hood, 1991, for a summary of these arguments). While the controversy over whether privatization or pluralization actually improves government functions is ongoing, one documented drawback of this approach is that market competition often reduces social accountability and social equity in public services (Joshi, 2008).

However, effective and socially equitable service provision is central to achieving poverty reduction; ill-health as a result of poor or absent services can prompt the descent into poverty, and reinforces vulnerability and insecurity among marginalized groups (Joshi, 2008). At the intersection of poverty alleviation interventions and the solid waste management system stands the waste-picker, or more specifically, informal sector waste worker. She has operated in India for generations, frequently subject to stigma and distrust, despite the fact that her

removal of a great portion of recyclable scrap from the waste stream relieves pressure on formal systems of waste transportation and disposal as well as the environment. “The attitude of the formal waste management sector to informal recycling is often very negative, regarding it as backward, unhygienic and generally incompatible with a modern waste management system” (Wilson et al, 2006, 798). Waste-pickers frequently work for 10 to 12 hours at a stretch, are extremely vulnerable to rent-seekers such as corrupt public employees and scrap traders, and “[rank] lowest in the urban occupational hierarchy, even within the informal sector” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2000, 3638-3639). As one might anticipate, waste-pickers are most often from the ‘untouchable’ castes (Wilson et al, 2006). As a recycler operating on a subsistence level, the waste-picker is undeniably a stakeholder in the municipal response to the critical solid waste management challenges in India and other developing countries. Not only does she warrant greater attention from a social policy perspective as an individual who is often excluded from public goods and services, but her role in solid waste management, namely the important contribution of recycling, must also be acknowledged. This begs the question: can informal sector actors be effectively and equitably incorporated into superior formal sector waste management solutions?

We have few examples of successful and sustainable public-private solutions to basic service provision that achieve efficiency as well as social equity and accountability. Though the literature suggests that such partnerships hold great potential in solid waste management, in part because informal sector activity in recycling is so prevalent, they are difficult to achieve (Ahmed, Ali, 2004). One solution suggested by some analysts that appears to bridge the informal and formal sector in the form of a complementary engagement of the civic with the State is “coproduction,” the transformation of inputs from individuals from distinctly different organizations into goods and services (Ostrom, 1996). There are a variety of ways in which coproduction between the State and civic society can be achieved, such as by sub-contracting to NGOs or the provision of services by organized citizen groups or associations (Joshi, Moore, 2002). Though the informal sector is

acknowledged as an important actor in forging inclusive governance systems, successful instances of the urban poor creating substantial change in collaboration with the State are rare (Harriss, 2006). Furthermore, planners stand to benefit from additional examples of informal sector worker organizations that exhibit not only longevity, but the ability to influence and leverage policy development and market relationships (Sanyal, 1991). We need explanations that explore in detail the organizational nuances, such as external as well as internal relationships and processes, which contribute to improved performance in service provision by informal sector workers and institutions in partnership with the State or private sector.

This paper examines innovations in the delivery of urban waste management through a case study of Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP), a union of waste-pickers based in Pune, and the Solid Waste Collection and Handling Cooperative (SWaCH), a novel doorstep waste collection cooperative that resulted from the union's joint effort with Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC). This collaboration not only reformed solid waste management and service delivery across Pune, but it also improved the lives, incomes and working conditions of the waste-pickers themselves, addressing the issues of both poverty and sanitation. As a case of two disparate institutions joining to create an innovative solution for improved service provision, their story is a good example of successful coproduction; it is useful and unusual because accounts of such partnerships are seldom told. In examining the nascent cooperative SWaCH, its origins, logic and future challenges, I draw out lessons for planners strategizing for poverty alleviation and improved basic services. This case study describes development processes that not only confront solid waste management issues, but the poverty and insecurity of a highly vulnerable and marginalized urban population. Similarly, this case fills a gap in our understanding of cross-sectoral partnerships for service provision as it represents an arrangement involving not just the State and the market, or the State and civil society, but segments and components of all three.

My central argument is that this collaboration went forward primarily because KKPKP maintained agility and adaptability in partnering with many organizations, both elite and grassroots, across the divisions of the State, civil society and private sector. Instead of committing to a static model, the founders of KKPKP guided the union on a trajectory that involved forming relationships at various levels, while remaining embedded and true to the demands of the union members. This commitment was demonstrated by KKPKP's success in lobbying and advocating for substantial social change while remaining autonomous and flexible. The incremental development over the 20 years of KKPKP's focused work resulted in the formation of SWaCH, an innovative and pro-poor solid waste management solution. Passed on, these same tactics of adaptable collaboration and commitment to waste-picker values will likewise promote sustainability of this doorstep collection service enterprise. Born from a municipal partnership and fraught with controversy, SWaCH will also undoubtedly encounter political and economic limitations and challenges as it extends its reach and services.

### ***The cast of characters***

This story involves fourteen important actors and institutions that are briefly introduced below.

**The Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) and its members:** This union of waste-pickers is the core focus of this paper. Registered in 1993, it has emerged as a leading organization advocating for informal sector waste workers in Pune. Its constituents are mostly female and from the 'untouchable' castes. KKPKP was instrumental in creating a unique and important partnership with the local municipal government to improve solid waste management processes in the city.

**SNDT Women's University:** A local university that incubated and supported the social development project that became the union KKPKP.

**The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC):** Like most urban local bodies, PMC was by no means a homogenous institution. It contained reformist bureaucrats interested in achieving social good and improving services as well as officials who opposed the

incorporation of SWaCH. Many of these individuals, such as PMC councilors and employees of the health and solid waste management departments, encountered the challenges of informal sector integration and politically unpopular solid waste management techniques, such as fee-based services, first hand.

SWaCH: The cooperative doorstep-collection provider, staffed primarily with members of the urban poor, which emerged from the collaboration between PMC and KKPKP to address shortcomings in the formal solid waste management system.

A network of NGOs: KKPKP and its activities, including SWaCH, occur in the context of variety of loosely linked NGOs. A number of local environmental NGOs engaged with KKPKP via its forum for environmental concerns, WasteMatters. Other waste-picker organizations in India are linked to KKPKP via the National Alliance of Waste-Pickers. KKPKP also collaborates with international NGOs, the Dalit Swayamsevak Sangh (a mass organization for 'dalits,' or 'untouchables'), and the informal sector labor union of porters, Hamal Panchayat.

The formal sector conservancy workers union: Like KKPKP, the organization opposed any privatization of waste services that might displace its members.

Other members of the urban poor: Some became workers for SWaCH.

The citizens of Pune: Some were sympathetic to the waste-picker's plight, though perhaps more so in the union's early years. Many were also discontented with municipal services. Some citizens opposed a waste collection system that demanded a contribution of either money, such as SWaCH's doorstep collection fee, or the time and effort of involved in waste segregation.

The village of Uruli Devachi: Many of its residents, fed up with the negative environmental impacts from Pune's landfill sited nearby, protested the dumping there vocally, at times halting operations. The urgency of the situation created a greater need for the waste management solution presented by SWaCH from the perspective of the municipality and the public.

Large and well-recognized governance bodies, such as the International Labor Organization and the All India Institute of Local Self Government: These endowed KKPKP with prominence and stature when they contracted it to provide studies and reports regarding waste-pickers and their role in solid waste management.

Private sector interests, such as contractors for collection, transport and disposal: Important stakeholders in the provision of solid waste management services, some have offered installation and operation of Refuse Derived Fuel waste-to-energy plants in Pune. These plants, which turn solid waste into pellets that are then sold and incinerated for energy, are frequently marketed as a 'panacea' for waste quantity and disposal challenges, and potentially exclude programs such as the one created by KKPKP. One such plant is already operating in Pune.

The Central Government: The Ministry of Environment and Forests played a key role in transforming municipal waste collection and fostering integration of the informal sector in solid waste management via the Municipal Solid Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules. These Rules were established in the year 2000 in response to the Supreme Court's directives driven by Public Interest litigation. The Central Government also funds these same Refuse Derived Fuel facilities that seem to threaten to displace waste-pickers by discouraging recycling and restricting informal sector participation in waste management systems.

The State Government of Maharashtra: This body dictated the inclusion of the urban poor in formal solid waste management and promoted the organization and endorsement of informal sector waste workers.

### *Methodology*

The bulk of my research was undertaken using qualitative methods during eight weeks in Pune, in India's State of Maharashtra, in the summer of 2009. I conducted interviews with 23 individuals via a snowball sampling method. I interviewed leaders and members of both KKPKP and SWaCH, faculty at the Karve Institute of Social Service, the heads and members of NGOs in Pune and other cities in India working to address waste management and social equity, and Pune municipal



officials and select citizens. My research also involved an extensive review of relevant literature. KKPKP has published a number of their own reports and studies, some commissioned by prominent institutions in academia and government. A number of these pieces are referenced. I contextualize this material by drawing on the theoretical debates regarding the politics of municipal service delivery contained in the literature on international development, poverty alleviation and solid waste management in developing countries. Specifically, I critically examine the recent literature on decentralization, privatization, pluralization, and the construction and preservation of accountability and autonomy in relationships between civic organizations and the State.

### *Organization of the paper*

In my first chapter, I begin by examining the origins of KKPKP, and then draw out the most important aspects that enabled its longevity, rapport with key actors, and efficacy in social programs. The second chapter, focusing more closely on SWaCH and its formation, attempts to explain why the municipal government was willing to enter into a binding agreement with KKPKP and submit financing to create a novel relationship and enterprise with an informal sector labor union famous for its demands and single-minded focus on the advancement of its constituency. The third chapter discusses challenges to the sustainability of SWaCH and the prospects for meeting its goals in this evolving arrangement and changing environment. The fourth and final chapter concludes with a discussion of how the lessons of this unique form of inclusive service provision might be applied more broadly.

### *The Pune context*

Pune, like many Indian cities, is currently grappling with rapid urbanization. With a growing population of nearly 4 million, a thriving IT sector, numerous large academic institutions, and an active and vocal civic population that includes hundreds of NGOs, Pune provides a striking context for studying urban planning issues. Such issues span a number of challenges, from the provision of basic services such as water and sanitation in a fast-growing urban area, to social development efforts to address the growing number of urban poor living in informal settlements.

Solid waste management, the focus of this paper, is a major hurdle. The administration of Pune and various citizen groups and NGOs are at constant loggerheads about the adequacy of services. The local news is filled with accounts of conflict at the municipal landfill, which has frequently been shut down by protestors who reside in the nearby village of Uruli Devachi (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009).

This controversy was brought into sharper focus by the institution in the year 2000 of the new Municipal Solid Waste Rules of the Government of India that propose more rigorous standards for waste management in urban areas. Pune's administration, like other urban local bodies, has responded in a number of ways, including considering unprecedented strategies, such as alternative disposal techniques and direct fees to consumers. It is in this policy space that new and quite innovative approaches in Pune have caught wider attention. In this paper I tell the story of one prominent initiative and the particular institutions, actors and processes through which it became implemented. They include KKPKP, a strong informal sector union, liberal and engaged citizenry and uniquely progressive city bureaucrats, who came together in an unlikely partnership to devise solutions to the waste management crisis that have not only been more successful than efforts in other municipalities, but have also had important outcomes for poverty alleviation and social equity.

## **Chapter 1: The story of KKPKP: The Union's History and Accomplishments**

### *The organization*

The Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (more commonly known as KKPKP) is a labor union of informal sector recyclers, or waste-pickers, founded in Pune in 1993. Its membership currently stands at over 6,000 workers. Approximately 92% of waste-pickers in Pune are women between the ages of 19 and 50 (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 117), corresponding to the fact that virtually all of KKPKP's members are female. At the time of this writing, KKPKP's membership constituted approximately 90 percent of the waste-pickers in Pune (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009), demonstrating the vast reach of the organization among the city's population of informal sector waste workers. The union is globally recognized for its work on empowerment and poverty alleviation and belongs to several alliances of informal sector and environmental advocates across India and internationally.

### *Striking achievements*

Despite this national and global reach, KKPKP focuses its services very locally, on its members and their families, to address the insecurity and vulnerability inherent in the waste-picker occupation. Members pay an annual membership fee of 20 Rupees (about .40 USD) and participate in the organization at varying levels. The union's approach has been to demand greater benefits and protections from the government as well as to assist members in taking advantage of existing pro-poor schemes, for example, programs targeting Below Poverty Level households. Many poverty alleviation programs in developing countries in the late 1980s were administered by local NGOs and funded by donors in industrialized countries. Unfortunately, most of these programs had little impact (Tendler, 1989). Like poverty alleviation, urban sanitation is a service that presents an ongoing challenge in the developing world (Ahmed, Ali, 2004). KKPKP stands out as surprisingly successful not only in contributing to sustainable solid waste management, but a

brief look at its achievements below shows that it has explicitly improved the lives of waste-pickers and their families, as well.

KKPKP has instituted and sustained a number of interventions and solutions for poverty among the waste-pickers in Pune since the early 1990s. First, it became one of the first unions for waste-pickers in India in 1993, achieving recognition of member ID cards from the municipality a few years after. Through a series of initiatives it improved the incomes, livelihoods and working conditions of its members. One notable accomplishment was the registration of a savings and credit cooperative, the Kagad Kach Patra Nagri Sahakari Pat Sanstha, in 1997, which supplies credit to members who deposit savings monthly at interest rates much less than typical informal credit sources—24 percent per annum versus rates as high as 10 percent per day (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2000). In 1998, a cooperative scrap shop was established in the neighboring municipality of Pimpri Chinchwad, operating on a “no-profit no-loss basis” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2000, 3642), and members who sell there receive a bonus at the end of the year. Second, KKPKP instituted a number of social insurance related programs. For example, it established a jointly funded health insurance scheme in partnership with the local government. The union also facilitates an affordable group insurance scheme that protects members against death and disability. KKPKP continues to explore ways to improve the waste-picking occupation as well as enable their members to increase their value added, whether by creating and marketing new waste-based products, such as envelopes to contain and demarcate used feminine hygiene products, or acquiring the skills to offer waste-based services such as composting (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). The ongoing success of these programs sets KKPKP conspicuously above the variety of institutions attempting to do similar work with the urban poor. This calls for an explanation of its good performance and notable accomplishments when many other organizations have failed to succeed in similar initiatives.

#### *The creation of the union*

Though KKPKP was not officially registered as a union until 1993, the activities of the organization that became KKPKP began in 1990. Its origins lie in a relationship

between a local university, SNTD Women's University, and Pune's waste-picker population, brokered by two activist-employees of the university's Adult Education Department. KKPKP's founders, Lakshmi Narayan and Poornima Chikarmane, engaged with local waste-pickers via a literacy program and through this learned a great deal about the menial and often precarious conditions under which the women worked. As the potential benefits of organizing the informal sector workers became clearer, the activists dialogued with the waste-pickers "to figure out with them whether they saw the point in registering a common organization that further[ed] their own interests" (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). Thus SNTD University fostered the formation of the official union, through its support of the activists who engaged the waste-pickers via the Adult Education Program, and by providing small honorariums to those working on the project, which in 1990 was called the Project for the Empowerment of Waste-Pickers.

The promotion of source segregation and doorstep collection of waste was one of the very first activities of the Project for the Empowerment of Waste-Pickers. The initiative was premised on the realization by SNTD University's Adult Education Program employees that reducing the time burden of work for the waste-picker households was the surest way to facilitate school attendance for their children, who were currently picking waste. The most efficient way to reduce the time spent by the households picking waste would be to enable them to collect already segregated waste directly from the source, instead of segregating it at the municipal bins and landfill. The Project issued identification cards to 30 adult female waste-pickers who wished to return their daughters to school. These participants collected segregated waste from sympathetic households in a nearby upper-class neighborhood.

The experiment proved very successful. In a 2004 case study on KKPKP's beginnings, the activists noted that the women's "earnings improved dramatically because source segregated scrap fetched better rates, reduced their hours of work and improved the actual physical conditions of their work" (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 1). This success was critical to clarifying and confirming three things for the

Project organizers and participants. First, that a simple strategy such as source segregation could dramatically improve the working conditions of the waste-pickers. Not only was it safer and more hygienic, it also reduced their workload and working hours and granted them increased income security, as well as enabling them to spend time on other household activities. Secondly, source segregation had real positive economic consequences for waste-pickers because it increased the value of their product and hence their work. Third, that source segregation required community participation and consumer buy-in, and this buy-in was feasible to achieve. The realization that waste-picking working conditions could be improved and economic benefits increased was vital to further mobilization and organization of the waste-picker community.

A second set of events moved this initial experiment from a university-community partnership to a mass membership-based organization that would increasingly involve the local government and citizens as well. Six months after the segregation program began, an entrepreneur with a motorized vehicle and two workers started offering a doorstep collection service in the same neighborhood, to households who were dissatisfied with the municipality's waste collection. The Project participants and leaders saw this event as a direct threat to waste-picker livelihoods. Through protests and appeals, the waste-pickers were able to dissuade the residents from purchasing the service, and the enterprise ceased (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 1). However, the waste-pickers and activists, with the guidance of Baba Adhav, the president of the prominent, local informal sector labor union of porters, Hamal Panchayat, realized that "small group endeavors were not likely to counter the threat" and they needed to organize on "a mass scale" (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 2). Though the threat was temporarily subverted, the organization recognized that there was little preventing such an obstacle from rising again, and that the waste-pickers could not assume eternal access to the scrap which was so crucial to their livelihoods.

The preoccupation with the continued right to waste was one of several critical concerns which included problems of health and safety, exploitation by public

sector workers such as the police, discrimination from citizens, unfair treatment from scrap traders, domestic violence, and the lack of a safety net in the case of old age or ill health. These difficulties, and the realization that private sector forces could threaten their incomes, set the stage for the integration of waste-pickers into Pune's formal solid waste management system by inspiring them to organize into a union. In a sense, it was an act of desperation by a group that can be forced no lower than it already has, but which risks being "left out" entirely if it does not step forward to advocate on its own behalf: "The formation of KKPKP was a logical progression in the process of organizing" (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 3-4). The move to unionize was informed by the fact that organization on a mass-scale had been successful for other informal sector groups, but also "had to do with the fact that legally a trade union is a 'workers organization' and we saw this as a first step in establishing waste-pickers as 'workers'" (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 5). The leadership, constituting informal sector grass-roots activists as well as the SNTD workers, saw a union as an effective way to institute larger systemic change, with the added benefit of the direct input and participation of the waste-pickers themselves, culminating in empowerment which would sustain the organization's efforts.

Two core assumptions were essential in prompting the formation of KKPKP in 1993: one, that waste-picking as an occupation could and should be improved (instead of eradicated), and two, that "scrap collection was socially relevant, economically productive, and environmentally beneficial 'work'" (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 3). The benefits reaped by the 30 women who participated in the early source segregation and collection effort, and the involvement of the SNTD Women's University volunteers in the day-to-day problems of a frequently ignored group, convinced the community of waste-pickers that collective action was a feasible and sensible course of action. The waste-pickers themselves, resigned to an occupation that was seen as demeaning, but at times preferable to options such as construction or domestic work, were not "interested in income generation programs that could enable occupational change but also entailed a long, slow process of learning new

skills and surviving in the market. They were interested in changing terms and conditions of work in their present occupation”(Chikarmane, Narayan 2004, 2). The prospect that waste-pickers could advocate on their own behalf to attain better job security, better income, and protection from the State inspired the decision to mobilize into a union and thus recast the occupation of waste-picking itself.

In Pune, in May of 1993, “a ‘Convention of Waste-Pickers’ was organized under Dr. Adhav’s leadership, by the SNTD activists and Mohan Nanavre, the son of a waste-picker, leader of the Dalit Swayamsevak Sangh (a Dalit rights organization) and long time associate of Dr. Adhav” (Chikarmane, Narayan 2004, 3). Over 800 waste-pickers from across Pune attended. The resolution put forward at the Convention established KKPKP officially. Membership was open to anyone working as a waste-picker who would pay a nominal annual fee (which is currently Rupees 50). The ideals and goals of the organization were also established at the Convention; that it would address both the pressing needs of its members, “but also be part of the larger struggle against injustice and exploitation”(Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 4). The union adopted methods promoted by Baba Adhav such as peaceful mass demonstrations, and though numerous social service programs would be instituted by KKPKP in the years to come, initially the organization offered nothing more than the opportunity to mobilize for a common interest. Membership grew rapidly, from 800 initially to 5000 that same year (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2000, 3641). As active membership now stands at roughly 6000, nearly two decades after the union was created, it is clear that KKPKP experienced rapid growth early on.

KKPKP issued ID cards to all union members beginning with the Convention, and bearers immediately experienced improved treatment from police officers, scrap traders and the public, and “began to see themselves as workers, not scavengers”(SNTD, Chintan, 2008, 46). This formalization of waste-pickers was an important step towards the collective empowerment of these vulnerable women, who had never been rallied before, and were previously virtually powerless when it came to negotiating rights and benefits. Given that the work of the waste-pickers resulted in economic and environmental benefits that accrued to the municipality



through the removal of scrap, the KKPKP leadership saw the recognition of waste-pickers as legitimate workers in the eyes of the local government as the fundamental next step.

The achievement of municipal endorsement of waste-pickers in 1996, three years after the union's founding, was the result of continuous, concerted efforts on the part of the nascent union to create a formal relationship between the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) and the organized informal sector workers. In this relationship, PMC, as the stand-in for a direct employer, would both further the acknowledgement of waste-pickers as workers and bear some accountability for their unjust conditions. The union's core mission was to improve the conditions of waste-pickers, and it recognized that source segregation and access to waste was one important aspect; government participation would be necessary in order to achieve this. "The KKPKP spearheaded the struggle for recognition of scrap collectors as 'workers' and scrap collection as 'work' by the Municipalities and later the state government through a series of processes. Foremost among them was organizing and mobilizing scrap collectors through public rallies and demonstrations"(Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 14). KKPKP also achieved this by effectively eliciting the sympathy of the public and the media in their cause. In the union's early years, public sympathy for waste-picker conditions was strong, and the leaders saw the press and the public as an effective source of leverage to attain municipal endorsement (Narayan, Pune, July 2009).

Also important was the quality of leaders in the municipal government, individuals who recognized the valuable contributions of waste-pickers and were willing to go against the political status quo and consider the union's perspective. One of the founders attributed the success of KKPKP to the fact that the city has had "a reasonably sensitive administration," (Narayan, Pune, July 2009), especially in contrast to other cities in India where officials often lack sympathy for the informal sector. More than one interviewee expressed that Pune and the state of Maharashtra boast a history of progress and openness to reform, perhaps due to a tradition of activism and system change pushed by such prominent figures as Dr. Ambedkar, a

celebrated advocate for 'dalit' rights (Karuna, Pune, August 2009). The presence of reformist bureaucrats in PMC similarly played a significant role in the story of the doorstep collection enterprise SWaCH—the Joint Municipal Commissioner and head of the Urban Community Development Department assisted in the registration of the cooperative, in line with his firm belief in promoting and sub-contracting to organizations of the urban poor.

The union membership cards were reissued upon municipal authorization by PMC in 1996, followed by the endorsement of the neighboring Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) in 1997. The new photo ID cards bore the signature of senior officials in PMC, and stated that the bearer was authorized to collect scrap in Pune. The ID cards, which had no legal basis and were for identification purposes only, prohibited individuals under the age of 18 years from picking waste (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 47). Following municipal endorsement, the ID card became even more useful, applied “creatively, sometimes as bail when arrested on suspicion and sometimes as surety when they did not have enough capital”(Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 14). For example, union members might present their ID card to police officers, municipal workers or citizens who challenged their right to collect scrap. As the founders noted in their case study, following municipal authorization:

The average waste-picker on the street is clearly able to state her contribution to the city's cleanliness, to argue her claim for space to sort the scrap, to convince citizens that she is not dirty because she cleans the waste that they generate, and to confront the police saying she earns an honest livelihood (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 15).

The formalization of the ID card by PMC forged it into a symbol not only of the waste-picker's value as an economic actor, but her right to work.

The union was able to leverage this recognition in several key ways. First, the union used the ID cards to claim benefits and resources from the State and continues to leverage the ID cards as the government creates new schemes (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). For example, based on the endorsement of waste-pickers as workers,

“KKPKP argued for the inclusion of children of waste-pickers in the Central Government aided Scheme for Pre-Matric Scholarships to Children of those engaged in Unclean Occupations”(Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 15). Previously, the scheme had only applied to those working as “night-soil carriers.” The irony of the government attempting to bar inclusion by not recognizing waste-picking as unclean was appreciated and emphasized by the local media, assisting the union’s cause by garnering public support (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 15). In 2001, the government of the state of Maharashtra included waste-pickers’ children in the scheme, accepting the municipal endorsement as proof of waste-picking as an unclean occupation. This benefited the waste-pickers in Pune by making scholarship funds available for their children. Though various pro-poor schemes of the government existed, such as ration cards for Below Poverty Level families, waste-pickers were not traditionally included in such schemes because they lacked the voice and resources to seek and demand benefits (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). The advent of the union and ID cards bearing the endorsement of the municipality opened up waste-picker access to various programs.

Second, KKPKP applied the PMC endorsement towards the creation of new, unprecedented programs to meet the needs of its constituents. In one very significant example, KKPKP argued that given PMC’s acknowledgement of waste-pickers as workers, and the implied responsibility of the State to protect vulnerable and marginalized citizens, PMC should contribute to the health of union members. Similarly, since waste-pickers were essentially self-employed but their labor benefitted the municipality, PMC was the logical source of benefits. “In 2002-03 the Pune Municipal Corporation became the first municipality in the country to institutionalize the Scheme for Medical Insurance for all Registered Waste-pickers in its jurisdiction”(Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 15). KKPKP members pay the premium to join the scheme while the municipality underwrites the benefits. As evinced by the distinction of ‘registered’ in the name of the scheme, recognition of the ID card prompted PMC to allocate and extend benefits to a specific population that had previously been virtually invisible. This logistical challenge of reaching or

measuring a targeted needy population is cited as a common motivation for public-private coproduction of basic services (Joshi, Moore, 2004, 41). Collaboration with the union enabled the municipality to effectively extend services to some of the most impoverished individuals in the city while reserving resources that might have otherwise gone towards outreach, documentation and evaluation for the intended beneficiaries. As an embedded intermediary, KKPKP assisted the local government in fulfilling its mandate of social inclusion at a lower cost and more effectively. This made the arrangement attractive to PMC for reasons beyond political pressure from the union.

Third, the endorsement by PMC also reinforced the rights of waste-pickers to access and utilize space. In 1997, KKPKP obtained the “right of waste-pickers to use by-lanes without obstructing traffic, as sorting sites for scrap” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 16). Lack of space to sort as well as store collected scrap is a great barrier to economic advancement and improved earnings for waste-pickers, and very few had access to dedicated space for this purpose. In 1998, the Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC), an adjoining district which has attracted numerous high-tech firms and thus also many waste-pickers (Sontakke, Pimpri Chinchwad, July 2009), endowed KKPKP with space to operate the first waste-picker run cooperative scrap shop in the area. This arrangement, ultimately granted by the Municipal Commissioner at PCMC, resulted from the persistence of the union in asserting the benefit of bypassing scrap traders. Scrap traders were essentially middlemen who diminished the economic rewards of the women and frequently took advantage of the vulnerable social status of waste-pickers with unfair prices and other tactics (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). Thus the establishment of the worker-owned scrap shop was a logical and important step in KKPKP’s overarching goal of reducing “points of exploitation” (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009) and extending the union’s advocacy.

#### *Reasons for KKPKP’s early success*

This overview of KKPKP’s history and its early successes suggests many themes and insights related to why KKPKP accomplished so much.

## 1. Demand-based, transparent and democratic

KKPKP fulfills the expressed goals of many pro-poor NGOs by being truly demand-based and remaining dedicated to transparent, democratic processes that effectively engage its members. Too often in India, the lack of an organized group or intermediary brokering visibly on behalf of the urban poor translates into lack of recognition and inclusion of informal sector groups in development strategies. Various authors have confirmed that the presence of committed and effective intermediary championing for the rights of the marginalized, or the ability of the marginalized themselves to form a vocal group, is regarded as important to that group's successful economic and social integration and development (Sanyal, 2008, Chen et al, 2001, Harriss, 2006, Joshi, 2009). While the existence of an advocating NGO can greatly improve conditions for a population of the urban poor, KKPKP has demonstrated that the direct involvement of the waste-pickers themselves makes such efforts more productive. This distinction stems from the fact that KKPKP is inherently demand-based as an organization constituted of impoverished informal sector workers, not merely an organization that attempts to speak for them. By requiring annual dues and engaging waste-pickers in decision-making processes, KKPKP ensures that issues truly important to its members inform the union's initiatives.

Since its creation in 1993, KKPKP, although a union, has functioned like an NGO by providing social programs for its members and involving middle-class activists who can more effectively dialogue with the State. Simultaneously, its union structure has promoted buy-in and increased empowerment on the part of its members. This is demonstrated by the fact that the leadership of KKPKP only pursues programs recognized as important by its members, a focus which helps the union avoid spreading its resources too thin, and reduces incidences of programs not generating impact or being sustained due to lack of political or financial feasibility (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). For example, a program like the waste-picker cooperative scrap shop would only be successful with sufficient interest and participation from the waste-pickers themselves. It would not only be pointless to pursue such a project

without expressed commitment from the members, but would also be a waste of resources.

KKPKP members communicate their needs and priorities via participation in the democratic processes of the union, such as frequent meetings to discuss activities under consideration. Additionally, the leaders of KKPKP recognize that requiring annual dues, the opposite of a subsidy, is a form of buy-in that sustains participation and ensures that the programs are appropriate as well as provides stable revenue (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). This approach was premised on the belief of its founders that the union's system "should certainly be transparent, it should be a process that the waste-pickers themselves are very actively involved in, it should be need-based, depending on their needs, not our needs, not funding determined, not activist determined, but obviously waste-picker determined" (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). While the KKPKP leaders admit the organization does not differ from many NGOs as far as its pursuit of demand-based and embedded programs (Narayan, Pune, July 2009), the fact that KKPKP has implemented many such programs successfully and continuously, distinguishes it from similar organizations, and can be attributed in part to its democratic, truly member-driven structure.

That organizing the urban poor themselves holds greater potential for their empowerment was not only recognized by the leadership of KKPKP, but by a subset of reformist bureaucrats within the Pune Municipal Corporation who partnered with KKPKP to develop benefits for its members and provide innovative sanitation services to the community. For example, Pune's Joint Municipal Commissioner and head of the Urban Community Development Department viewed organizing the residents of Pune's slums into Neighborhood Groups and Self Help Groups as crucial in creating sustainable self-governance and empowerment—because without organization, not only are the poor unrecognized as individuals with needs and rights, but they lack the inter-relationships that enable them to advocate for themselves, to improve their financial situation, and to upgrade their livelihoods (Kalamkar, Pune, August 2009). This prominent official's belief in the value of organizing the urban poor towards greater empowerment, and his belief that

KKPKP was uniquely embedded in the community it served, contributed to his later promotion of KKPKP's doorstep collection efforts in the form of SWaCH. A local environmental activist gave the informal sector advocacy group and KKPKP ally, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) as a parallel example to KKPKP, because in its founding, it also focused on empowerment and mobilization as the first step to achieving livelihood improvements (Menon, Pune, July 2009). Empowerment of the beneficiaries themselves, in contrast to the processes employed by many charitable groups, holds greater potential for long-term success in poverty alleviation.

One reason KKPKP's founders were able to mobilize an effective organization of the urban poor was their creation of solidarity based on a specific trade and occupation. The Convention in 1993 brought together hundreds of waste-pickers in the city for the first time, and impressed upon them that they have allies. One founder asserted that waste-pickers were brought into programs more effectively not simply because the programs themselves were attractive, but because they identified strongly with the waste-picker identity (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). Others working closely with the urban poor in Pune saw the great heterogeneity and lack of internal connections as one of the greatest challenges to reaching and empowering them (Kalamkar, Pune, August 2009, Shailabh, Pune, August 2009).

Occupational solidarity also endowed KKPKP with greater internal strength. KKPKP leaders cited the attraction of inclusion as a strong motivating factor for the very high member participation in demonstrations—even if members didn't feel very strongly about a particular issue, they joined in collectively agitating for it due to a conviction of the importance of advocating for the larger group (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). An active KKPKP member in Pimpri Chinchwad referenced the democratic decision-making process utilized within KKPKP, and described how members saw value in supporting a particular program even if it wouldn't benefit them personally immediately (Sontakke, Pimpri Chinchwad, August 2009). This collective mobilization and the fact that KKPKP frequently demonstrated its size very visibly in the form of protests or sit ins enabled it to create so much change in various

levels of government (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). Whereas smaller organizations of the urban poor such as Self Help Groups can concentrate social capital and build community cohesion, a large union like KKPKP is more likely to get heard by the State (Menon, Pune, July 2009). In order to improve conditions for the urban poor, political voice and recognition is critical. Income generation at the micro-level might improve security for some, but large, organized groups are crucial channels through which wider social change can be effected. By drawing alliances based on occupation, KKPKP succeeded in creating commonality and community among a large population of the urban poor. This successful harnessing of the energies of a mass group has made it more effective in agitating for and creating change.

Its founders see KKPKP as distinct from other unions: "Although KKPKP is a trade union, and trade unions are stereotypically looked upon as 'militant,' 'disruptive,' 'unreasonable,' 'violent,' and 'demanding,' the antagonism so far has been overridden by the 'sympathy' factor...The waste-pickers' struggle for their rights is seen as having a justifiable basis. The KKPKP has consciously and systematically tried to build support for waste-pickers among citizens"(Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 6). Scholars confirm that informal sector unions, in contrast to formal sector unions, "have adopted strategies that are less confrontational but, in the long run, perhaps more effective for their members, who first and foremost seek acknowledgement of their contribution to the economy"(Sanyal, 2008, 154). KKPKP frequently approaches citizen groups in order to create dialogue, and is aware of the importance of public perception. Scholars have also asserted that mobilization of the marginalized in developing countries to create lasting change often hinges on coalitions that cross class (Goodwin, Skocpol, 1989). KKPKP itself is an example of a successful cross-class organization that does not sacrifice the voice and agency of the urban poor in advocating for them; similarly, the union acknowledges the value of creating dialogue and alliances with those outside its specific membership

One way in which KKPKP has achieved this is by specifically avoiding becoming "dogmatic," in contrast to many unions that overlook or support the unethical



actions of their members for the sake of loyalty (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). This has enabled it to maintain the support of the public, the government and the media. “Unlike conventional trade unions the KKPKP has also focused on social development activities such as credit provision, education and child labor in addition to work-related economic issues”(Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 7). KKPKP’s involvement in such interventions portrays it as more sympathetic to the government and the public. The leaders’ willingness and interest in exploring and engaging in issues related to waste-pickers but not explicitly to labor, such as environmental issues surrounding solid waste management practices, or the concerns of local citizen groups, demonstrates an ability to occupy a middle ground (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). In a sense, KKPKP is a hybrid organization—a social-minded NGO that guards itself against the rent-seeking behavior, public distrust and antagonistic position of typical labor unions, but is more demand-based, focused, self-sustaining and autonomous than a typical NGO.

## 2. Political independence

KKPKP has explicitly and strategically remained unaffiliated with a political party. KKPKP’s non-alignment with a formal political party has enabled it to work with various groups, both within and outside of local government in negotiating gains for its constituents. According to KKPKP’s founders, unlike “a lot of mass organizations [which] are supported by political parties...we have neither been approached by a political party nor are affiliated with a political party, so we dialogue with whatever dispensation is in power”(Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). The leaders of KKPKP emphasized the importance of remaining unattached to any political party from the very beginning, which increased credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and also made continuous open dialogue with workers and officials within PMC possible. For example, a city councilor, and chair of the committee which sanctions municipal tenders, suggested that all the city’s efforts to create a new solid waste management system would be for naught if KKPKP were influenced by politics, implying that political interests greatly hinder productive cross-sectoral agreements (Nikam, Pune, July 2009). If the union were to collaborate specifically with one

politician or recruit the support of a certain political party, its partnerships and agreements would also be vulnerable to changes in power. Political non-affiliation was also intuitive, as the waste-pickers had no pre-existing political connections.

Interviews with government representatives and staff from partner NGOs emphasized KKPKP's ability to converse with multiple actors within the government, which aided it in remaining dedicated to the interests of its members. The head of the Urban Community Development Department also expressed reluctance to work with NGOs that might have political affiliations, implying that it could call his own credibility, as well as the NGO's motives, into question (Kalamkar, Pune, August 2009). Clearly the flexibility of political non-alignment, as well as the increase in trust gained by demonstrating political autonomy, aided KKPKP in forging relationships and making gains.

Related to the idea of political non-alignment is the fact that the political terrain in Pune requires a great deal of accountability from an organization like KKPKP that works closely with government. The successful creation of SWaCH cannot be separated from the degree of accountability demanded of it from other civic organizations—and Pune is full of them, whether they be citizen groups advocating for their own interests, or “opportunistic groups” who didn't like the idea of SWaCH taking over doorstep collection in Pune (Chikarmane, August 2009). When SWaCH first emerged, a number of other organizations also suggested their own proposals, which “is bound to happen in a city where there is some amount of civic awareness” (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). Because of the strong civic participation in Pune, KKPKP and SWaCH had to answer to numerous community groups and elected representatives who questioned their methods (Menon, Pune, July 2009). Remaining autonomous from any political party or figure better equipped KKPKP to respond to such accusations and criticisms.

In this sense, the work of KKPKP represents a divergence from the electoral accountability method, a method that while traditionally a channel for the urban poor in India, relegates them to the identity of ‘denizen’ instead of citizen (Harriss,

2006, 10) and has proved inadequate as a social accountability mechanism, or method for leveraging basic services (Houtzager, Joshi, 2008, 3). Social accountability mechanisms can be more effective than the vertical electoral process or horizontal “institutional checks and balances” because they operate outside of politics (Joshi, 2008, 13). Ultimately, it proved more beneficial for KKPKP to reject this vertical electoral channel and the associated political patronage by employing more innovative and flexible mechanisms to appeal to the State.

### 3. Accountability and reciprocity

KKPKP lobbied PMC in such a way that exerted pressure for reform and improved government services while also fostering a positive relationship. The leaders of KKPKP used the phrase lobby to refer to the broad spectrum of their advocacy activities—everything from mass demonstrations, to meetings with government committees, to ‘exposure visits’ or ‘trainings’ that involve government officials, to the various studies and reports the union has published (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). Though some of the tactics resemble those of a ‘pressure group,’ the interviews with outside observers as well as KKPKP affiliates reflected consensus that KKPKP has maintained a positive relationship with the Pune Municipal Corporation, despite being at times forceful in its demands (Mhaskar, Pune, August 2009). Other activists in the community confirmed that holding government representatives accountable for promises made frequently required mass demonstrations or citizen protests, as well as “finding the sensitive ear” when lobbying (Menon, Pune, July 2009). KKPKP used these types of tactics to reform PMC but was also accepted as a partner or assistant in this reformation, creating what some scholars refer to as the ‘institutional fit’ between civic groups and the State that sets the stage for ‘the politics of inclusion’ (Houtzager, 2003). For example, PMC has cited reports generated by KKPKP regarding the management of solid waste in Pune and the contributions of the informal sector in their publications and presentations, including interviews with PMC health officials (Wavare, Pune, July 2009). Such documentation, which did not exist prior to KKPKP’s involvement, provided PMC with a resource and set an expectation for the local government to be

more thorough and accountable in its solid waste management practices, including monitoring and evaluation (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). KKPKP provides a unique example of a civic organization materially improving the operations of a government body and assisting it in meeting the mandate of a higher authority.

PMC was a logical and crucial organization for KKPKP to influence and partner with for various reasons. For one, as the administrators of social services, it was in the best interest of municipal officials to placate the public, who demonstrated dissatisfaction with the abysmal conditions so apparent among waste-pickers, who were in constant view (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 6). Secondly, PMC, unlike an employer when confronted by a union, had less reason to retaliate against waste-pickers for mobilizing. Scrap traders in Pune, on the other hand, were organized, and could limit waste-picker incomes by setting rates or refusing to do business with them. Finally, solid waste in Pune becomes municipal property as soon as it is deposited into public waste bins, and thus the government was an important ally due to its power to restrict waste-picker access to scrap. The importance of forging a beneficial relationship with the state inspired the leaders of KKPKP to use a variety of tactics to engage PMC officials.

The willingness to demonstrate, and the ability to continue to dialogue with PMC despite this, keeps KKPKP both autonomous and effective. Demonstrations, and the power inherent in the mass size of the waste-picker movement in Pune, were primary tools in getting PMC on board with ID card endorsement and other benefits, and crucial to the union's success (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). The fact that the endorsement of the union was not secured until 3 years following the formation of KKPKP illustrates the union's persistence. However, KKPKP does carefully consider its relationship with PMC when deciding how and whether to publicly demonstrate, based on the context and the demand from the membership in each instance (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). A local activist confirmed the need at times for an organization such as KKPKP to exercise influence: "The city...has its own priorities for what it would want funds for and so providing certain capacity for the informal sector may come only after putting a lot of pressure on the city" (Gadgil,

Pune, July 2009). The director of a local institute of social work emphasized the need for the numerous civic organizations in Pune to hold local government accountable by “creating lobbies, and pressurizing local self-government to act as per the law” (Walokar, Pune, August 2009). It is clear that somewhat antagonistic approaches on the part of KKPKP, employed in consideration of existing laws, were as important as diplomatic approaches in ensuring PMC fulfilled its responsibilities.

Though KKPKP took a vocal and demanding approach in insisting on benefits and recognition for waste-pickers, because it appealed to PMC on the basis of social development and existing laws encouraged not only agreement, but also an amiable relationship with the State. Demanding accountability while evoking welfare within accepted legal frameworks reveals avenues for the state to meet its existing responsibilities without questioning its logic (Joshi, 2009). The Urban Community Development Department of Pune expanded its activities in the mid-90s as a result of decentralization (Kalamkar, Pune, August 2009), and PMC thus could showcase the formalization of waste-pickers, a substantial system change, as a logical progression of its pro-poor activities, rather than compensation for an earlier shortcoming. Thus the multiple approaches of research, appeal on a social basis, and public agitation in the form of protests and sit-ins combined to assist KKPKP in reaching many of its milestone achievements regarding the engagement of the municipal government.

#### 4. Varied linkages and relationships

From its inception, KKPKP has fostered links and partnerships with a diversity of institutions and movements. KKPKP has many linkages with other NGOs and formal and dominant as well as informal sector institutions. As demonstrated earlier, KKPKP originated from a relationship with SNDT Women’s University, and it was part of the leaders’ strategy “that we had a university department which offered some kind of academic name, as it were” (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). One founder described the university’s role as one of “promoter of people’s organizations”(Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). While KKPKP became its own

institution when it exited the “experimental phase,” by registering as a union (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009), undoubtedly its numerous formal and informal sector linkages enabled it to scale-up (Sanyal, 1997). Collaborating with the State enabled KKPKP to increasingly upgrade conditions for waste-pickers, fitting the observation that “NGOs engaged in poverty alleviation should not be totally disconnected from market and state institutions. Instead, they should work closely with these institutions, cleverly crafting institutional strategies that would enhance their effectiveness as development agents” (Sanyal, 1997, 23). While KKPKP’s leaders early on pursued endorsement and a relationship with PMC, they also recognized the value of a diversity of partnerships from the beginning, and sought to partner with grass-roots local groups as much as elite institutions and the State.

As KKPKP’s collaboration with the State grew and deepened, its ties to a much wider set of actors in civic society and grassroots social movements were key to retaining its flexibility while furthering its reach. Such multiple linkages can be crucial in maintaining an NGO’s autonomy from the State, as well as protect against internal power struggles when it becomes large (Sanyal 1997). For example, the union’s engagement with Hamal Panchayat, and the frequent participation of its members in demonstrations and rallies organized by the radical yet accomplished informal sector union and other informal sector organizations (Narayan, Pune, July 2009), lent it credibility among the urban poor early on, and later kept it distinct from the same municipal government which had endorsed it. The leaders of KKPKP also partnered with “a mass-based ‘dalit’ group which was very much part of the organization, it still is, so the combination of all that also worked” (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). Later, KKPKP would reinforce this autonomy from the State by creating a sister organization, in the form of SWaCH, in order interact with PMC to fund KKPKP’s efforts at a doorstep collection program, effectively creating a buffer between the union and the municipality (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). Linking up with government, though crucial to KKPKP’s goals, would have endangered its autonomy and inhibited other important relationships in the absence of these varied ties.

Relationships with large research and governance institutions, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), the German federal development organization GTZ, and the All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIILSG), were forged and encouraged in recognition that endorsement by such entities would greatly support KKPKP's work. KKPKP chose to work with these organizations through research, carrying out studies sponsored by them that illuminated waste management issues and the reality and role of the informal sector. Specifically, the founders recognized that their arguments regarding the contributions and working conditions of waste-pickers would not be considered legitimate unless endorsed by large, well-known institutions. Without this type of public acceptance by an organization like the ILO or GTZ, readers would likely not "trust the methodology or the figures" and studies commissioned by a "big name" carried more weight (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). In the case of the 2001 ILO-commissioned public study on waste-picker livelihoods, the ILO approached KKPKP because the union was one of the few organizations working closely with waste-pickers at the time (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). The GTZ study, which occurred "across 6 cities in different continents," incorporated KKPKP's input thanks to an encounter at a conference with an advocacy group based in the Netherlands, WASTE (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). For the AIILSG study documenting solid waste management in Pune, KKPKP proactively sought the "stamp of authority" from this entity (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). These types of endorsements enabled KKPKP to use the reports to further the union's goals and recommendations, lending the union greater influence and acceptance in the public sphere while allowing the staff to collect and analyze data according to their own methods.

Additionally, KKPKP's ongoing goal of upgrading occupational and livelihood conditions for its membership required a broader view supported by active research. "We had to finally move beyond just worker needs and look at the larger framework in which those workers worked and the changes that were taking place in that area, because otherwise we would have become redundant very soon"

(Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). The KKPKP leadership noted that the sector of solid waste management in particular has undergone significant “rapid change” in the last decade—some of which the union encouraged and some of which originated elsewhere (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). The pursuit of research by KKPKP’s leaders was not only to establish credibility, but also to better understand the sector themselves. Ultimately, KKPKP succeeded in remaining pertinent and effective, as their research bolstered their ability to integrate their members into formal sector solid waste management.

No less important were the alliances KKPKP spearheaded with local as well as national and international NGOs. The leaders of KKPKP formed WasteMatters to link up with environment-concerned NGOs within Pune. This partnership enabled the groups to argue more forcefully for ecologically superior management by local government. Though KKPKP’s interests are not exactly aligned with other such NGOs in Pune, its leaders recognized that the goals of increased scrap recovery and recycling support environmental concerns, and could be leveraged towards greater advocacy and influence (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009). One of the initial participants in the alliance described the formation of WasteMatters, which became very active in informing government policy in 2006, as initiated by KKPKP in order to “expand and partner with other organizations in Pune, primarily because they were looking at graduating from being the trade union...starting to integrate with waste-pickers much more widely into doorstep collection, and the thought that having a broad-based partnership of NGOs would help in doing that” (Menon, Pune, July 2009). The union’s leaders see engaging with the larger environmental movement as another way to remain aware of new solid waste management developments as well as advocate for improved conditions for waste-pickers (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). Just as organizing waste-pickers was a logical extension of advocacy, recognizing and emphasizing the environmental value of their work is a logical extension of KKPKP’s relationship-building and expertise.

Ultimately, the alliance of WasteMatters assisted KKPKP’s goal to achieve source segregation and doorstep collection towards improving livelihoods for waste-



pickers. WasteMatters prompted the Municipal Commissioner to set up “a core committee to look at policy-level issues of waste management,” in which the alliance pushed for waste-picker inclusion in the doorstep collection of waste, influencing the City Development Plan to recommend informal sector integration (Menon, Pune, July 2009). Though the CDP is not a binding document, this achievement demonstrated the perceived importance of maintaining channels of influence: “We shouldn’t have to wait until the draft plan is published to get our comments in...but have our inputs into...the creation of the draft development plan itself” (Menon, Pune, July 2009). This mirrors a strategy of KKPKP—the idea of striking while the iron is hot, when the window of opportunity opens, before possibly harmful policies become institutionalized. The NGOs also hold PMC accountable to the environmental mandates of the state law, including providing space for sorting and storing scrap. Thus the creation of WasteMatters, to harness the discontent of various activists regarding Pune’s unsustainable and inefficient solid waste management practices and lack of environmental quality, was a savvy and productive move by KKPKP’s leadership to inform their own initiatives, maintain influence on government, and promote waste-picker livelihoods.

It is key that KKPKP is seen as working towards creating agreement, and educating and engaging numerous groups to achieve common understanding and common goals. The director of a local school of social work cited KKPKP as effective in building waste-picker awareness and capacity, and also creating “consensus” (Walokar, Pune, July 2009). In reaching out to other NGOs and community groups, KKPKP reveals the value and overlap of its work. Even though it is dedicated to the interests of its specific members, the union demonstrates core beliefs that resonate with other groups. KKPKP also prompted the formation of the National Alliance of Waste-Pickers in 2005, understanding the value of shared knowledge, including technical assistance which KKPKP, a seasoned organization, could offer the other waste-picker NGOs and unions in India.

KKPKP has been involved with WIEGO as well as other international waste-picker advocacy groups, and attended the 2010 Copenhagen talks to advocate for

preserving the livelihoods of the informal sector recyclers around the world, and draw attention to the superiority of recycling in contrast to other waste management methods. A member of WasteMatters attributed the success of the union to the wide range of activities it undertakes: “They are doing the grassroots work, the mobilization and empowerment of the most dis-privileged people in the city, to actually doing the policy work at the city, state, national and international level...They undertake research and studies, so it’s rigorous work that they do, and...they’re bang in the center of what sustainable development means” (Menon, Pune, July 2009). As will be discussed in the next chapter, networking proved to be crucial to KKPKP’s success in shaping and informing the Municipal Solid Waste Rules of 2000 to create a space for the integration of waste-pickers via doorstep collection; because of its prominent work, the union was tapped to provide input during the drafting and were able to encourage language that recommended recycling, source segregation, and the inclusion of waste-pickers. By forming relationships that related to waste-picker rights, but also engaging a variety of stakeholders such as citizens, environmental activists and international development organizations, KKPKP remained aware of emerging issues, potential challenges and new opportunities to further its cause.

## 5. Pune’s context

It is difficult to ignore the context of Pune; from its citizenry to its government, and which social, cultural and demographic features may have assisted in the success of KKPKP and its programs. KKPKP’s leaders acknowledged that Pune’s size was particularly “manageable” (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). Staff of CHF International, a global humanitarian aid organization, undertaking projects organizing and integrating waste-pickers in other cities confirmed that, unlike in Bangalore or Nagpur, the city is not so big or spread out to thwart uniting the waste-picker community, yet there is enough mass to mobilize into a loud and recognizable voice (Buddhe, Phone, August 2009, Chengappa, Phone, July 2009). KKPKP’s co-founder did refute the idea that simply having a union, regardless of its size, would make a difference. The waste-pickers in Pune “have been recognized as a constituency, as a

force,” in part because “the decision-makers understand the value of numbers” (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). The success of the union and its programs in Pune are thus directly linked to the substantial number of waste-pickers working there, as well as possibly the circular, centralized geography of the city.

According to its founders, the nature of the city of Pune, its administration and demographics, contributed to the success of KKPKP more than timing or the greater political climate (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). The union has undeniably worked hard to be acknowledged and “visible, and therefore articulating on behalf of itself that it needs certain conditions,” but whereas many cities in India have a long history of corrupt or obstinate government officials, “Pune has not had a string of such people...We’ve had...a reasonably good, let’s say, sympathy value for waste-pickers who were perceived as a really poor, marginalized group which had been hitherto neglected, so we got some level of mass external support...a kind of moral support. So those factors do make a difference” (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). The predominance of government administrators who appear insensitive to the needs of the informal sector is noted in the literature as well (Sanyal, 2008). Likewise, many describe the public in Pune as highly educated, progressive and socially aware, and that the city as well as the state of Maharashtra has a history and reputation for activism and civic engagement (Sreenivas, Pune, August 2009). The large number of NGOs in Pune, at least 200 of which are “very professional” (Walokar, Pune, August 2009), as well as the presence of a sympathetic media (Narayan, Pune, July 2009), also relates to this. While many interviewees observed that the municipal corporation in Pune is widely considered superior to most in India, and is exceptional in encouraging civic engagement (Jagtap, Pune, July 2009), representatives of KKPKP believed that “it is the activist activity in Pune that keeps the PMC on its toes, so to speak” (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). The municipal corporation is perceived as not only more efficient and effective than comparable administrations, but as open-minded, even “pioneering” when it comes to social programs — especially the Urban Community Development Department, which came to play a prominent role in the integration of waste-pickers via SWaCH. The

fact that Pune's elected officials have been consistently progressive created an atmosphere where KKPKP could successfully go forward, and the presence of a liberal and sympathetic citizenry also enabled the union's success. KKPKP seemed to both foster, and was fostered by, a progressive activist attitude prevalent in Pune.

#### 6. Quality of leadership

A final reason for KKPKP's success that is clearly related to the previous explanations, but bears additional attention, is the focus, dedication and foresight of KKPKP's leadership. One founder stated that an important factor towards KKPKP's success and longevity were the "people who started it," including Baba Adhav, Mohan Nanavre and SNTD University, "who kept their focus on the cause," and did not engage in power struggles (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). Another NGO head described how the unique and distinct "orientations" of each leader contributed to KKPKP's achievements: "It is both the strengths of academic rigor and ground-level rigor that is really embodied in Poornima and Lakshmi, that's this axis of KKPKP" (Menon, Pune, July 2009). The singular commitment to the cause, and the lack of ego or vested interests kept KKPKP on a sustainable and effective trajectory.

Also key is that two middle-class women from educated backgrounds successfully embedded themselves with the waste-pickers in Pune, gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges they faced. Thus KKPKP seems to rebel against the categories for Indian civil society organizations posed by Harriss, in being a union that was mobilized by middle-class activists but does not perpetuate the subordination of its poorer beneficiaries by being 'for the people', rather than 'of the people' (Harriss 2006). Such embeddedness and a history with the community aids program success, and highlights a challenge for organizations trying to address issues in a particular community for the first time. "A baseline survey would indicate certain things, but if you have no relationship with the community, you don't get very good data" (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). A PMC official, in noting his willingness to work with KKPKP when he was typically averse to working with most NGOs, touched on the importance of both leadership quality and embeddedness when he

stated that “definitely they are different, they are very sincere, they have access to grass-roots level, whatever they say, they do it, there is a commitment” (Kalamkar, Pune, August 2009). This statement highlights not only that KKPKP is perceived by many to be truly demand-based and engaged with the community of urban poor, but also that its staff maintain a sincerity and follow-through perhaps not demonstrated by all NGOs, however well-intentioned.

One way in which the activists secured the trust of the waste-pickers was by demonstrating their recognition that upgrading waste-picker occupations was a preferable recourse to attempting to move the women into occupations outside of working with scrap. “This understanding translated into KKPKP’s perspective on scrap collection and the organizational strategies that derived from it” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 2). To assume that some occupation, that might pay slightly more than waste-picking, is worth the long hours of training and skill development and time spent away from income generation, simply because it might be within the formal sector or outside of waste, “that itself is a very, very fallacious kind of presumption to make, so we would never make it”(Narayan, Pune, July 2009). Such a shared perspective created the demand necessary to effectively mobilize and participate in the union.

The efforts of the leaders to remain cognizant of emerging issues and foresee potential future threats aided in the union’s success and sustainability. KKPKP began working well in advance of many of the current challenges, before waste management in Pune had reached the level of crisis that seemed to require privatization of municipal services. Because its leaders recognized the inevitability of such issues, KKPKP was able to identify proper tactics, position itself as an articulate, informed and effective advocate for a vulnerable population and address these threats before they were irreversible. As early as the year 2000, the founders cited the impending arguments over the rights of various individuals or groups to access valuable scrap, and the social as well as environmental problems in adopting expensive solid waste management technologies just beginning to be hawked by the private sector (Chikarmane, Narayan 2000, 3642). “When we started this doorstep

collection service around 18 years ago we were far more convinced than any waste-picker that asking citizens to segregate waste and give them access to segregated waste would do a lot to improve their conditions of work and ensure that they were not displaced by private contractors or waste-to-energy plants” (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). Though the majority of the members were less inspired to mobilize around displacement than they were around issues like police harassment, the leaders of KKPKP succeeded in shaping the programs and initiatives of the union to guard against this threat, through institutionalizing the doorstep collection service as well as exploring other opportunities for value addition.

KKPKP’s trajectory demonstrates a commitment to varied relationships, strong internal processes that are democratic and transparent, and a portfolio of lobbying tactics. The achievement of PMC endorsement set an example for other informal sector organizations and Indian municipalities, and endowed KKPKP with greater legitimacy in the eyes of other powerful institutions. Teasing out the reasons behind KKPKP’s success helps explain how this unique and largely unprecedented collaboration between PMC and KKPKP, the coproduction of solid waste management services, evolved in the form of SWaCH.

In the next chapter I will outline the history of SWaCH as well as discuss the particular reasons why KKPKP was able to convince PMC of the value of this arrangement and thus create a space in the formal solid waste management system for its informal sector members, securing their continued livelihoods as well as upgrading their current occupational conditions and job security.

## **Chapter 2: The Birth of SWaCH (Solid Waste Collection and Handling): An Accountable, Affordable and Equitable Waste Management Solution**

The Solid Waste Collection and Handling Cooperative, or SWaCH, is an innovative, poor-inclusive approach to improved solid waste management in the city of Pune. In 2007, a contract between PMC and KKPKP for the delivery of doorstep waste collection services created SWaCH as a separate membership-based enterprise. Operational as of 2008, SWaCH is responsible for implementing the doorstep waste collection initiative. The contract between PMC and KKPKP stipulates that in addition to the necessary infrastructure, such as carts, gloves and boots, PMC will dedicate funding of roughly one crore, or ten million, Rupees each year for five years, that is, until 2012, after which SWaCH is expected to become financially self-sustaining. The governing board of the service provider is made up of 14 waste-pickers, two representatives from Pune Municipal Corporation and one representative of KKPKP. Its management team, whose salaries are covered by PMC, includes a CEO and staff in operations and training. Currently, SWaCH employs over 1600 women as doorstep collectors, largely but not exclusively KKPKP members, serving roughly 200,000 households (Jog, Pune, August 2009). SWaCH operates in all 14 wards of Pune, and as of 2008, in 127 of the 144 quortis, or electoral subdivisions within the wards (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 52). SWaCH is structured as a cooperative, in the interest of sustainability and member buy-in, in the same mode of KKPKP's other revenue-generating ventures, such as the scrap shop and credit society.

Doorstep collectors work in pairs serving roughly 100 households, traveling from door to door daily to collect the segregated waste. On a monthly basis the pair of collectors take a fee of 10 Rupees from each household or establishment, splitting it between them. The Pune Municipal Corporation agreed to cover half of the monthly fee for households in informal settlements though SWaCH staff report this obligation has not been fulfilled (Jog, Pune, August 2009). In their role in the doorstep collection system, households and commercial units are expected to keep

their organic waste, also referred to as wet waste, in a separate bag or bucket from their dry or inorganic waste, and hand both over to doorstep collectors. Though the law mandates source segregation and doorstep collection of solid waste, citizen participation is effectively voluntary, as many PMC officials avoid penalizing properties that refuse to either segregate waste or pay the monthly fee. As doorstep collectors have little incentive to collect waste from households who refuse to pay, this results in spotty participation; as of August 2009, of the 127 quortis SWaCH operates in, 10 enjoyed nearly 100% service coverage (Jog, Pune, August 2009). It is not uncommon for doorstep collectors to segregate the waste themselves upon receiving it from the waste generator. Virtually all dry waste collected is recyclable and the collectors are free to sell the scrap and retain the profits. Though the ultimate goal of PMC is for all waste generators to dispose of their own wet waste on site, via vermiculture, composting or biogas, not all sites have this capacity yet, and again, municipal enforcement is weak. Thus, in many cases, the collectors transfer the wet waste to municipal trucks at designated collection points.

SWaCH has various additional staff members who coordinate and monitor the doorstep collectors to ensure proper support as well as fulfillment of duties. The SWaCH administration assigns each of the 14 municipal wards a field coordinator, who works closely with the ward office in that area, for example, synchronizing the “feeder point system” which enables the collectors to deposit wet waste with the municipality, and also looks after roughly 10 supervisors working at the quorti-level. The supervisors in turn monitor 25 to 30 women who collect waste door-to-door in each quorti, keeping track of absenteeism or interpersonal conflicts such as complaints from citizens, or whether the workers have adequate equipment (Jog, Pune, August 2009). The SWaCH administrators and the Solid Waste Management Department of the Pune Municipal Corporation convene every two weeks to discuss issues and needs, and communicate in the interim as needed. To ensure the future sustainability of the cooperative, doorstep collectors who earn more than 1000 Rupees a month are asked to contribute 5 percent of their earnings back to the



organization. They do not contribute any of the profits they make from selling the dry recyclable scrap they collect.

SWaCH was born in the new political space created by the central government's issuance of the MSW 2000 Rules. The Rules were drafted by a Committee on Solid Waste Management set up by the Honorable Supreme Court of India in 1998, in response to a petition filed by Almitra Patel, among others. Published by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Rules set new standards for municipal solid waste management, such as a doorstep collection system, separate systems for certain generators such as hospitals and hotels, the promotion of source segregation to ensure the recycling of scrap, and the processing of organic garbage "using least-polluting biological methods" (Chikarmane, Narayan 2006, 5). KKPKP had already quasi-formalized its members and achieved protections and benefits in 1996 through the municipality's recognition of the union ID cards, but the union sought further achievement of source segregation and ensured continued waste-picker access to waste. From the perspective of PMC, the contractual agreement with KKPKP and promotion of source segregation provided a solution to the new guidelines, which they were required to institute by 2003, and the impending solid waste disposal crisis. Importantly, the agreement allowed PMC to circumvent the controversial push towards privatization and improve its performance in solid waste collection and disposal in collaboration with an organization that already enjoyed recognition and support amongst both municipal officials and the public.

However, the funding of SWaCH by was not without opposition, from other community groups as well as PMC officials. The proposal to give the work of doorstep collection to a cooperative of waste-pickers roused various civic organizations, which formed committees to lobby their elected representatives not to support the initiative (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 32). Though the financial support to SWaCH was approved by the Standing Committee and the General Body of PMC in February 2007, the turnover in the members of the General Body following elections resulted in "a few detractors in the new body which rescinded the approach granted by the General Body after the cooperative was registered" (SNDT, Chintan, 2008,

52). However, the new Municipal Commissioner was also supportive of SWaCH, and successfully appealed to the state government to “overrule the municipal body’s resolution to rescind” (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 52). Though the creation of SWaCH required much advocacy and struggle on the part of KKPKP, it confirmed the strong relationships the union had with various levels of government that recognized the social contributions of the union as well as the economic contributions of its member-workers.

The integration of SWaCH within the municipality’s solid waste collection system came with many caveats, which may have ultimately benefitted KKPKP by allowing it to maintain autonomy from PMC, as well as assisted its ability to self-scrutinize and thus innovate and improve. For example, three other organizations of the urban poor in Pune who were undertaking waste management activities became part of SWaCH as part of the renegotiations with PMC (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 36). A second agreement required that SWaCH collectors would not demand employment directly from PMC, but rather would be paid from the fee of 10 Rupees per household that they collected themselves. By the time the contract formalized SWaCH, there was already a 10 year history of benefits, such as medical insurance, provided to waste-pickers thanks to the collaboration of the municipal government; this stipulation protected PMC against providing additional benefits above and beyond the existing schemes. Thirdly, PMC also required SWaCH to open doorstep collector positions to any member of the urban poor, regardless of whether they were previously a member of KKPKP or even a waste-picker (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 52). Finally, the five-year sunset agreement after which SWaCH would not receive any direct financial assistance from PMC protected PMC against ongoing responsibility if the doorstep collection enterprise was not successful.

Given the context of KKPKP’s foundational work as well as the unique political and logistical challenges faced by the emerging enterprise, I will now explore in more detail how this context translated into the adoption of SWaCH’s solid waste management model.

## 1. Informing solid waste management standards

KKPKP influenced the creation of the very rules that mandated these changes — that is, source segregation of waste, doorstep collection and disposal of organic waste on site. The endorsement by PMC of KKPKP and the union's achievements that followed enabled further waste-picker acknowledgement and integration, on government levels above the municipal, thus establishing a channel of influence from the bottom up as well as a mechanism for further improvement in Pune. The union exercised this influence by informing the drafting of the MSW 2000 Rules. The Committee on Solid Waste Management requested input of KKPKP and other waste-picker advocacy groups in India in drafting its recommendations. In 1998, KKPKP as well as SEWA and Stree Mukti Sanghatna sent recommendations requested by the Committee, emphasizing not only the preservation of waste-picker livelihoods, but also their very integration into the solid waste management processes. Additionally, the Committee deployed a representative to Pune to gather more information from KKPKP on how to successfully integrate the informal sector in solid waste management (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 29). Consequently, the Rules, which “direct the municipalities in 41 Class I municipalities to extend their mandatory responsibility (collection from common points) and undertake measures for door-step collection of waste and citizens education for source segregation,” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 16) also recommend the integration of waste-pickers, though that aspect of the rules is discretionary (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, Annexure III). This influence was not completely unprecedented, as the endorsement of union ID cards by PMC and PCMC in 1996 and 1997 had “since been followed by a notification from the Maharashtra State government directing municipalities to register waste-pickers and issue identity cards and pursue methods of integrating them into solid waste collection through their organizations or through NGOs” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 14). The Government of Maharashtra issued these directives in 1999 and 2002 respectively, and KKPKP credits the interest in waste-picker integration to the “presence of mass organizations of waste-pickers in Pune and Mumbai and other cities” (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 16). KKPKP was clearly successful in not only

influencing government norms as they related to waste-pickers, but also using the recent legislation to the union's advantage.

## 2. Foresight and prior understanding

KKPKP was poised to take advantage of a situation in which PMC considered privatizing doorstep collection of waste because it had foreseen this problem, and recognized the value of source segregated waste in improving the conditions for waste-pickers. The union leadership was likewise cognizant of the threat to continued waste-picker access to waste if PMC contracted out or privatized waste collection. Because KKPKP created a relationship with PMC in 1996 that established the waste-picking occupation as valuable in economic and ecological as well as social terms, the union could then effectively argue for a solid waste management solution that incorporated waste-pickers and further improved their conditions. KKPKP also recognized that allowing consumers to deposit un-segregated waste into bins in public locations created a scenario in which the waste-picker not only had to dig through dangerous and unclean materials, but potentially competed with those who were not waste-pickers, but recognized the value of scrap, such as conservancy workers, security guards and domestic help (Chikarmane, Narayan 2000, 3641). The establishment of the MSW 2000 Rules by the central government created an opportunity to further push for continued access to waste and fill a service gap that would improve as well as ensure continued waste-picker livelihoods.

Some municipalities chose to meet the national mandate by contracting out doorstep garbage collection, and the KKPKP founders observed that this option displaced waste-pickers in places such as Nasik, Maharashtra (Chikarmane, Narayan 2006, 16), just as the contracting of entrepreneurs for doorstep collection by dissatisfied citizens in Pune had displaced future KKPKP members (Chikarmane, Narayan 2000, 3640). The anticipation of such a probable outcome inspired KKPKP to step in and provide an alternative for PMC before it moved to officially privatize the mandatory doorstep collection in Pune. "An important outcome of Almitra Patel

vs. The Union of India was that by December 2003 the Supreme Court expected that a system of door-to-door collection of segregated waste, composting of organic waste, and recycling of recyclable wastes was to be in place in all municipalities. This created an unprecedented opportunity for waste pickers with some degree of organization to directly access household garbage” (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 29). Integration of the informal sector into doorstep collection was desirable because the gleaning of recyclable scrap would be more efficient if waste-pickers gathered directly from households, and waste-pickers would become an essential street-level worker. Their face-to-face interactions with households on a daily basis, with the expectation that households would personally segregate dry and wet waste, ensured a higher level of accountability on the part of the waste generator in contrast to a more impersonal system, employing salaried workers who have no incentive to guarantee segregation. Because the dry waste would be recycled by the waste-picker and (eventually) the wet waste would be disposed of on the residential site, per the MSW 2000 Rules, virtually zero waste would go to the landfill. Before these Rules were actively implemented in 2003, waste-pickers made a living from undertaking waste segregation—but they were never paid for the labor, they only earned income from the scrap they filtered out and sold. Thus promoting source segregation did not detract from the occupation of the waste-picker by taking away paid labor she had previously performed, but rather had the effect of making her job more efficient and thus more profitable (Chikarmane, Narayan 2004, 13). KKPKP was already organized, fast growing, and connected with the waste-pickers as well the municipality and larger community, and had articulated the value of enhanced waste-picker access to segregated waste through its research and prior pilot projects.

### 3. Demonstrated capacity

While KKPKP had clearly established itself as an expert on solid waste management, it was also able to demonstrate its ability to start a cooperative enterprise in solid waste management, due to a 2005 doorstep collection pilot which was conducted with the political support of PMC and the cooperation of its ward officers. KKPKP

pursued a number of doorstep collection initiatives from the beginning, but the “Harbingers of Cleanliness” pilot which served homes in all 14 wards of the city, with cooperation and discretionary funds from specific ward councilors, was probably the most formal prior to SWaCH’s establishment in 2007. KKPKP’s leadership confirmed that the pilot arose from a perceived opportunity related to the government’s MSW 2000 Rules about segregated waste collection. Based on the MSW 2000 Rules, “In February 2005, the Pune Municipal Corporation adopted a stand that it will collect only segregated wet waste into its stream...This was in an effort to promote and enforce segregation and encourage the integration of waste-pickers for the door to door collection of dry, recyclable waste” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2006, 48). KKPKP drew on its record of facilitating source segregation and doorstep collection in a number of neighborhoods to initiate the pilot and demonstrate these benefits to the municipality (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 16-17). “By the end of 2006 almost 1200 waste-pickers were integrated as service providers, covering over 150,000 households and recovering user fees,” in Pune (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 50). A portion of expenses was covered by a local agency, while PMC provided the cycles; KKPKP pressed PMC to support the pilot on principle, because PMC benefitted, and support represented a stronger endorsement of the work of the union (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). KKPKP did not contract the service, but simply promoted it, with PMC’s permission and the cooperation of local representatives at the ward level. The waste generators, residential as well as commercial, contracted with waste-pickers directly via a monthly service fee. The pilot positioned KKPKP to argue effectively for the merit of further investment from PMC in order to expand and revamp this operation. KKPKP had shown that it could take resources provided by government and use them effectively, not only in the pilot, but also in other KKPKP programs, such as the health insurance scheme and scrap shop.

KKPKP staff outlined two key lessons of the pilot: “One, that waste-pickers can change their way of collection to provide regular daily...waste collection services...It is possible for them to change their pattern of work. Second, was that citizens, if

provided a good service, are willing to pay for the most part”(Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). While KKPKP’s leaders observed in 1990 that waste-picker livelihoods and work conditions could be improved by door-step collection of segregated waste, the 2005 pilot further proved that a fee-based system could be successful. The two achievements, changing waste-picker habits and achieving voluntary participation from waste generators, are also linked; improvement in the services and reliability of the doorstep collector will encourage participation and buy-in by the waste-generator, and vice versa. The pilot may not have achieved such successful integration if not for the institution of the MSW 2000 Rules, but clearly KKPKP’s past experience and strategy played a large role.

#### 4. Informal sector integration as solid waste management reform

Additionally, KKPKP successfully presented the formal integration of local waste-pickers as a compelling reform of the city’s solid waste management system that would reduce the municipality’s burden in terms of the transportation and disposal of waste. Thanks to its past achievements and status as one of a few organizations in India working directly with the informal recycling sector, KKPKP was accepted as an expert on informal solid waste management systems and a useful sanitation service intermediary. Supported by studies conducted with the involvement of credible institutions, such as the ILO and SNDT Women’s University, KKPKP convincingly demonstrated that integration into the formal system would not only improve conditions for waste-pickers and reduce costs for the city, but that the current system was unsustainable and inefficient.

A 2006 assessment of Pune’s solid waste generation and options for processing, conducted by KKPKP and commissioned by the All India Institute of Local Self Government (AIILSG), exemplifies how the union’s research effectively promoted SWaCH and reformed PMC’s existing waste management. While AIILSG specified the formats for primary data collection, the approach and drafting of the final report was in the hands of KKPKP’s leaders (Narayan, Phone, February 2010). The report informed PMC regarding the quantity, content, calorific value and density of waste

generated in Pune's different wards, as well as the capacity for adequate and cost-effective collection and transport. It set a precedent in data collection and documentation regarding waste management in the city, and made innovative recommendations towards improving the system and integrating the informal sector.

The study emphasized that a more personal, primary mode of collection would be more efficient, and successful at keeping waste segregated, than the current system. PMC fulfilled the bulk of its required door-to-door collection of waste with ghanta-trucks (bell-trucks), which stopped in the street outside properties and rang a bell to notify residents to bring out their garbage. The report noted "the abysmally low collection of garbage by the ghanta-trucks in some wards makes it a very expensive method of door-to-door collection for PMC" (Chikarmane, Narayan 2006, 47). In some wards, the cost to PMC was as much as 5 Rupees per household per day for doorstep collection, which was "completely unsustainable in the long term" (Chikarmane, Narayan 2006, 47). The authors noted that the waste burden was less in wards where "PMC authorized waste-pickers" collected dry waste, and the trucks accepted only wet waste (Chikarmane, Narayan 2006, 48), and suggested instituting a fee-based doorstep collection service staffed by authorized waste-pickers. PMC's prior (1996) recognition of waste-pickers was useful — the reference to waste-pickers as "authorized" or "PMC authorized" workers throughout the report was a nod to KKPKP's previous accomplishments, including the ongoing doorstep collection pilot. The document outlined various reasons why it was difficult to enforce that citizens give segregated waste to the ghanta-trucks. For example, the irregularity of the service timings led the residents to dispose of waste in municipal bins instead, and PMC workers were unwilling or unable to compel residents to keep waste segregated and lacked the incentive to do so since they didn't stand to benefit personally (Chikarmane, Narayan 2006, 49). As ghanta-trucks appeared inefficient in contrast to doorstep collectors, the authors suggested the alternative of fixed feeder points where waste-pickers would hand over organic waste to municipal workers. The report even noted that this new system would not only be



more cost-effective, but would assist PMC's compliance with the MSW 2000 Rules by utilizing "cooperatives/organizations of waste-pickers/self help groups/ informal service providers" to better meet collection and recycling requirements while simultaneously promoting poverty alleviation, "also the statutory responsibility of the municipality" (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2006, 54). Thus the report supported the notion that employing waste-pickers, who would receive payment only if they performed their duties, to collect segregated waste directly from households was a superior collection system for a number of reasons.

The recommendations regarding the informal sector did not end with the suggestion of integrating waste-pickers into the formal collection system. The report recommended spaces for scrap sorting, storage and sale in the city, and suggested the potential for bio-gas to deal with organic waste, and promoted continued waste-picker access to recyclables by declaring that "any technology requires a particular density or presence of combustible recyclable waste will be unsuitable," a reference to the Refuse Derived Fuel plant under consideration by the city as a disposal technique (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2006, 56). SWaCH staff asserted that it was advocacy and lobbying such as this that tipped the municipality towards funding the cooperative: "There was enough advocacy and lobbying done and there was enough data to prove that the waste-pickers' role in the whole solid waste management cannot be denied. It could be shown that the dry waste that they were recycling was definitely reducing the burden of the Municipal Corporation, and so the Corporation obviously had no choice but to accept the services" (Jog, Pune, August 2009). This information, endorsed by a credible government institution such as AILSG, was difficult for officials at PMC to discard and ultimately informed the administration's decisions around solid waste collection and disposal, paving the way for the formation of SWaCH.

The assessment also drew attention to gaps between policy and implementation on the part of the local government and enumerated various reforms, including the reallocation of personnel, the installation of more electronic weigh bridges, the re-planning of fleet routes, consistent enforcement of segregation and disposal rules at

the household level, and capacity building for municipal planners and implementers. PMC had not yet thoroughly measured or documented waste generation and collection in Pune; the study clearly influenced the administration's perspective, evinced by the fact that the data regarding the waste burden as well as the cost-savings to the city thanks to waste-pickers are often cited by officials in the Solid Waste Management and Health Departments at PMC (Jagtap, Pune, August 2009). The report also promoted separate waste streams for dry and wet waste, which was later institutionalized by PMC (Wavare, Pune, July 2009). Through its research and advocacy work in collaboration with AILSG, KKPKP provided PMC with a mode for much needed reform in solid waste management by clarifying and documenting the existing system.

#### 5. Capacity and buy-in on the part of doorstep collectors

KKPKP has been more successful at integrating the informal sector into formal solid waste management systems than some other organizations in India (Buddhe, Phone, July 2009, Chengappa, Phone, August 2009). The less successful cases frequently involved NGOs which hadn't built a sufficient rapport with the informal sector workers, or attempted to employ members of the urban poor who were not familiar with working with waste, or were not able to effectively organize the workers into a cohesive group. KKPKP, by contrast, was not only well-organized and structured enough to propose and follow through on the cooperative model, but, more importantly, it had the buy-in and support of its members, and SWaCH has been careful to adequately train the women as well as ensure that they have proper expectations of what the work will entail prior to beginning. While some programs that seek to employ the urban poor are subsidized in the sense that the workers are paid for their training time, or compensated for transportation or childcare, this does not fit with KKPKP's philosophy. The union staff will not pursue programs unless the members perceive them as beneficial enough for them to bear these costs themselves (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). It was at open monthly meetings with the KKPKP members that the union decided to undertake the SWaCH program, and these same meetings are used to recruit doorstep collectors (Jog, Pune, August

2009). Because the union leaders had gauged waste-picker interest and undertaken similar programs and capacity building, they had confidence that there was enough demand among their constituency, and enough faith in their decision processes, that a sufficient number of waste-pickers would be willing to adjust to a service-oriented occupation. The middle class activists were able to understand and push the needs and concerns of waste-pickers so effectively because they had successfully embedded themselves within the waste-picker community for at least 3 years before the formalization of the union, “establishing close and enduring reciprocal relationships with the waste-pickers” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 2). This shared history of mobilization, complemented by the long years of experience, research, advocacy and prior engagement with the local government, sustained participation in SWaCH going forward. Because the union undertook doorstep collection efforts in 1990 as well as in 2005 and then in 2007 with SWaCH, the program was developed gradually enough to convince waste-pickers, who previously may not have realized first hand its benefits or felt comfortable with the required skills and processes, that it represented a sure avenue towards security and better working conditions.

The head staff at SWaCH described a relatively transparent job recruitment system that ensures that the women who apply for the jobs are properly matched and have a full understanding of the expectations of the position. Recruitment of workers is also geographically based: “We still go from community to community having meets with women who are not integrated yet, we ask them to come and become members in the system, and at the same time, whenever there is demand in a particular area” (Jog, Pune, August 2009). When citizens ask for SWaCH to serve their neighborhood, “we contact the slum in that area, we find out women in that area, we have a meeting with them, we go and show them the work...and only then we quote the rate...So the women see the work, they decide what kind of dry waste they’ll get from there, how far it is from the municipal system, how much they will have to travel to deposit the wet waste into the system, so after all that is seen by the women, they decide whether they will work or not, and then we integrate them into our system” (Jog, Pune, August 2009). The workers are given ample opportunity to

weigh the costs and benefits for themselves, and no one assumes that integration into the program is inherently preferable.

#### 6. Degrees of formalization

SWaCH gained a foothold in part because of KKPKP's savvy negotiation of degrees of private versus public as well as formal versus informal. Though risky, at times the blurring of boundaries between the private and public sectors has proven effective in improving public service provision (Joshi, Moore, 2004), and some authors challenge the assumption that formalization is dualistic rather than a spectrum, and that it is by nature superior to informal status in the developing world (Sanyal 1996, Peattie 1980). Just as KKPKP blurs the boundaries between autonomous and integrated in its relations with the State, SWaCH represents a gradual or partial shift from public to private and informal to formal by offering neither traditional privatization nor traditional public service provision. Public procurement from groups of the urban poor is not unusual in Pune, though it is new in waste (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). For example, the Pune Municipal Corporation, in fulfillment of its commitment to pro-poor initiatives, purchases needed items such as folders and school uniforms exclusively from Self Help Groups, or partially formalized group microenterprises made up of poor women within the city (Kalamkar, Pune, August 2009). In SWaCH's case in particular, the municipal government was fulfilling its directive of supporting poor entrepreneurs as well as taking advantage of existing informal sector mechanisms for waste management and recycling.

In creating this new form of privatization, the SWaCH system also protects the ability of impoverished women who have worked in waste-picking for years to gain the capital represented by recyclable scrap. As stated by a KKPKP founder, "SWaCH itself is a form of privatization...but it is a privatization model that is inclusive of the poor, rather than excluding them" (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). If collection was privatized by the State, waste-pickers would likely lose access to scrap as well as have no other option than to work for the companies, realistically at exploitative

wage rates and with few rights or benefits (Bahora, Pune, July 2009). KKPKP also anticipated the risks of 'panacea' disposal technologies such as Refuse Derived Fuel in displacing waste-pickers by discouraging recycling and creating a closed collection system, and continues to argue that "the state is duty-bound to protect the interests of those affected, displaced and marginalized by market processes" (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2000, 3642). Noted one of the founders:

"We believe that the door to door collection model should be separate and reserved for the small sector and not be taken over by other bodies because...even if the other bodies do take it over like they did in Delhi, there is an integrated contract from collection to disposal, they are unable to handle the intricacies of collection, door to door collection, so they actually farm it out to NGOs and smaller contractors and the small contractors hire the same labor at exploitative rates and do the same thing. So it is against the workers' interest to enter into that kind of arrangement" (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009).

SWaCH's distinction of being 'poor inclusive' accesses the useful skills and ambitions of the informal sector and protects the waste-pickers by preserving their independence from exploitative market actors. This approach is evident in the cooperative's exploration of opportunities for other income-generating tasks that draw on the waste-pickers' skills and experience, such as managing composting and bio-gas facilities, which requires a high level of segregation (Sreenivas, Pune, August 2009, Jog, Pune, July 2009). The creation and maintenance of non-exploitative work opportunities for waste-pickers is the central goal of SWaCH.

The use of contractors for waste management is prevalent in India, and creates service situations that are difficult for the informal sector and its advocates to penetrate or subvert. Development workers at a large international aid NGO engaged with waste-picker needs and solid waste management in Nagpur and Bangalore cited the difficulty in prompting a municipality to change its service and procurement systems where private sector providers are already in place, or achieving commitments from those contractors to equitably employ the local poor (Buddhe, Phone, July 2009, Chengappa, Phone, August 2009). One exception might be the arrangement in Latur, where the waste-pickers, municipal government and

small contractors are working together in a non-exploitative and mutually agreeable way. Adhar Sevabhawi Sanstha Latur, a waste-picker collective since 1996 and member the National Alliance of Waste-Pickers founded by KKPKP, facilitates waste-pickers in working as sub-contractors to the companies handling waste collection for the municipality. The Latur Municipal Corporation pays the contractor 650 Rupees per ton of mixed waste collected from households; the sub-contractors who work the tractor, collecting and sorting waste, receive 145 Rupees per ton to split between them, as well as keep the profits from selling the scrap (Kamble, Pune, July 2009). The apparent success of the arrangement in Latur undoubtedly relies in part on the city's geography, disposition of local government as well as private sector, and the presence of a waste-picker advocacy group at the right stage. It is also clearly driven by the fact that the contractor as well as sub-contractors are paid by the municipality based on the quantity of waste, in tons, collected from the households, thus incentivizing good performance. It presents another example of the potential for quasi-formalization to be more successful than outright corporate competition.

The KKPKP leadership confirmed the value of gradual or partial formalization of the informal sector. The early union organizers focused on upgrading the occupation, rather than changing it; instead of completely formalizing the occupation by seeking positions for the women as formal waste workers, the leaders pursued quasi-formalization via the endorsement of the municipality, which resulted in improved rights and conditions without sacrificing flexibility and autonomy. Staff at KKPKP offered a parallel example in the work of Hamal Panchayat. This pioneering informal sector union of porters, whose leader guided KKPKP in its early years, pushed for an Act that established a structure to provide porters with social security. By taking levies from those who employ porters and contributing them towards benefits that are then claimed by registered workers, the Hamal Boards create an employer-employee relationship that grants security and equity, but does not represent "formalization in the way that is understood in terms of the formal sector" (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). The leaders of KKPKP saw the Hamal Panchayat

model as an example of a way “to retain the benefits of the informal sector and yet reduce the exploitative aspects of the formal sector” (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). According to its President, Hamal Panchayat explicitly avoided the creation of contract relationships between porters and employers, in favor of a more free structure (Adhav, Pune, August 2009). PMC officials influential in the founding of SWaCH also favored quasi-formal arrangements when integrating the urban poor, recognizing that full formalization could have bad effects because it requires small organizations of the urban poor to compete on an unlevel playing field (Kalamkar, Pune, August 2009). KKPKP’s adaptability and success hinged on the recognition that the informal sector, though often precarious and exploitative, has facets of opportunity and flexibility that should not necessarily be sacrificed for more binding and unfamiliar arrangements. Instead of trying to place waste-pickers in existing formal sector jobs, SWaCH created a unique position which drew on the waste-picker’s particular valuable experience while improving her conditions, while providing necessary support and capacity-building.

#### 7. Atypical privatization

Related to the quasi-formal character of the cooperative, SWaCH was also able to go forward because it did not pose a threat to the formal sector waste management union, whereas privatization of waste collection and transport constituted a threat to both formal and informal sector unions, and was strongly opposed by both. KKPKP’s founders observed, roughly a decade after the formation of the informal sector union: “The Pune Municipal Corporation has not pursued the privatization through the contractors’ route because of the presence of a strong municipal workers union and an equally strong waste-pickers union” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 17). By authorizing and thus endorsing KKPKP’s cause, PMC strengthened the informal sector union and hindered its own potential to privatize the labor-intensive aspects of waste management. A local environmental activist noted that the union of municipal conservancy workers in Pune previously blocked the introduction of waste management techniques, such as mechanized street sweepers, in the interest of protecting jobs (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009). Equally crucial is the fact that KKPKP

did not demand waste-picker employment in the existing formal sector system; thus SWaCH does not present a threat to formal municipal solid waste employees who clearly would otherwise oppose it. This is another way that SWaCH occupies the gray area in the formal-informal spectrum, filling a gap without strong opposition. “The fact that doorstep collection of garbage was never the mandatory responsibility of the municipalities [previously] and the prohibitive costs of hiring regular labor to fulfill that added responsibility, offers the space for waste-pickers (through the KKPKP) to negotiate their claims for public-private partnerships to fill the gap between the door-step and the common collection point, without antagonizing the municipal unions” (Chikarmane, Narayan, 2004, 18). KKPKP did not have to wrest doorstep collection away from another company, as has been a problem in other cities where collection has already been privatized (Chengappa, Phone, July 2009) and similarly, SWaCH was formed in such a way that existing formal sector waste management workers were not threatened. While formal waste staff may oppose privatization or the direct hiring of waste-pickers, the creation of a brand-new organization and occupation that did not infringe on existing operations could proceed without opposition from the strong formal sector conservancy worker union.

#### 8. Urgency of the solid waste management crisis

A clear crisis of performance further prompted the Pune Municipal Corporation to consider coproduction of services as an alternative. The protests of the villagers at Uruli Devachi, the current landfill, as well as the observation by the state Pollution Board that the landfill was not functioning properly, and PMC’s understanding that the city’s population and thus waste generated was only growing rapidly created a sense of urgency to find a solution. The state government’s Pollution Control Board has asserted that PMC is in violation of the waste disposal requirements of the MSW 2000 Rules (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009), and the city’s poor management of the landfill at Uruli Devachi has led to widespread criticism from citizens as well as outright protests from villagers adjacent to the site. According to municipal officials, in response to the pollution surrounding the landfill, which was in operation for two



decades, the residents of Uruli Devachi agitated for its closure, giving the municipality several months to permanently cease dumping (Nikam, Pune, July 2009, Jagtap, Pune, July 2009). While this ongoing pressure motivated PMC to consider and institute a portfolio of waste management approaches, from decentralized bio-gas plants and vermiculture, to Refuse Derived Fuel plants, it simultaneously heightened the administration's reliance on SWaCH. Solid Waste officials at PMC saw SWaCH as a crucial ally in addressing the waste crisis and shoring up the city's deteriorating reputation with the public (Jog, Pune, August 2009). Given the problems at the landfill and the prospect of unabated waste generation, if SWaCH were to discontinue service to the tens of thousands of households it currently serves, PMC's credibility would suffer a tremendous blow. SWaCH staff saw the problem at Uruli Devachi as assisting the young enterprise by reinforcing a reciprocal relationship of dependency, and a sense of urgency on the part of PMC that SWaCH close the gaps in household participation and coverage. The publicity around the crisis also made citizens and officials in the local wards more amenable to cooperating with the doorstep collection efforts (Jog, Pune, July 2009). Thus while the gross mismanagement of waste created the conditions in which an innovative solution such as SWaCH was needed, the outcry regarding Uruli Devachi also enhanced demand for the program.

#### 9. Affordability from the perspective of the municipality

It was in this context that KKPKP created a proposal that was more cost-effective for PMC than privatization, requiring only a relatively small financial investment for the first 5 years, followed by continued cooperation and provision of PMC service infrastructure. At the end of the term of funding in 2012, SWaCH will emerge as an independent cooperative that operates on fees collected from the households. The arrangement clearly holds appeal as an alternative to a private contract arrangement that would require ongoing payments from the city. Thus, from the perspective of PMC, SWaCH represents an opportunity for a cheap and sustainable method of materially reducing the burden of solid waste on PMC — something that is very prescient and critical, with the closing of Uruli Devachi and public resistance

to building more landfills on rural land (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009). Contrary to a common criticism of service privatization, accountability will be maintained as the municipality will not be able to retreat, but will remain involved in SWaCH because of the necessary communication between PMC employees and SWaCH staff and collectors, and PMC's pledge of continued infrastructure such as carts, boots, gloves and masks. One of KKPKP's arguments for instituting SWaCH was that individual doorstep collectors increase accountability of waste generators for source segregation as well as fees; this was appealing to PMC because waste-pickers would be responsible for collecting controversial fee from households, which was the lynch-pin of this model. SWaCH thus addresses not only a service provision gap, but also a funding gap, by tapping citizens for the funds to assist the over-stretched municipality in improving waste management.

#### 10. Presence of reformist bureaucrats

Finally SWaCH was able to go forward despite controversy from other elected officials and the public in part due to champions such as the Municipal Commissioner and the Joint Municipal Commissioner who were willing to interpret their responsibilities in a way that supported the KKPKP initiative. The project benefited from the support of high-ranking officials within the Urban Community Development Department who sincerely believed in the poverty alleviation and empowerment goals of the department, and in the importance of the inclusion of the urban poor in formal market and governance processes. Such officials were instrumental in securing the agreement with KKPKP to fund SWaCH. The Joint Municipal Commissioner and head of the Urban Community Development Department was involved in drafting the contract that established and registered SWaCH (Kalamkar, Pune, August 2009), but willingly relinquished the bulk of his involvement at the insistence of the vocal opposition (Narayan, Phone, February 2010).

Not only was the initial support of powerful officials crucial; their willingness to put the initiative before personal interest and remain flexible under intense scrutiny

and criticism may have ultimately preserved the project. Similarly, SWaCH was saved from dissolution at the last moment by the Municipal Commissioner's willingness to appeal to a higher level of government. A local activist experienced in environmental issues and government accountability in Pune credited the success of KKPKP in part to the presence of "an administrative head who was sympathetic to the cause of waste-pickers" who was willing to take political risks to get SWaCH implemented (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009). A common theme of the interviews was also that "PMC is not a monolithic structure"—highlighting the fact that KKPKP was not negotiating with it as an institution per se, but with specific individuals, some who were more sympathetic than others (Narayan, Pune, July 2009) and boosted in the ability of the union to succeed. "In 2007 the PMC once again made history by resolving to support an integration model outside the contracting framework. The General Body Resolution in Pune was preceded by a pilot to scale that drew legitimacy from authorization given by the Municipal Commissioner using his powers under the BMC Act" (SNDT, Chintan, 2008, 17). The Municipal Commissioner and Joint Municipal Commissioner both enacted their roles supportively and consistently, despite political pressure, and were unique in rising to the expectations placed on them by society as well as higher levels of government, for example by engaging stakeholders in drafting the City Development Plan (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009). Thus the accomplishment of SWaCH was clearly enabled by progressive officials who saw the value of KKPKP's contribution to society as well as demonstrated a commitment to fulfill their duties exceptionally. In this chapter I explored and highlighted the important contextual as well as internal organizational aspects that positioned KKPKP to successfully suggest and implement the SWaCH cooperative. In the following chapter, I will describe a selection of obstacles and limitations that need to be acknowledged and surmounted in order for SWaCH to be successful in the future.

### **Chapter 3: Future Challenges to SWaCH: Obstacles to Sustainability**

My research drew out various challenges that SWaCH will face in the oncoming years: the possibility that privatization, possibly incompatible with SWaCH, will still be pursued; the question of whether SWaCH can continue to provide effective service and--if it remains the only doorstep collection provider--avoid the drawbacks of a monopoly; and the need for increased buy-in of the citizenry, particularly in terms of their willingness to pay for a doorstep collection service from women who may not yet have strong customer service skills. These lessons and discussions will be useful in highlighting important considerations regarding how this model might be scaled up across India or other urban communities in the developing world.

#### *The continued threat of privatization*

Despite the appropriateness of the SWaCH mechanism, the increasing generation of waste in Pune and the lack of consistency in government implementation in addressing it perpetuates the threat of privatization of solid waste management and the displacement of waste-pickers. Even municipal representatives supportive of SWaCH offered the tendering of solid waste management to contractors as a possible solution to the time-sensitive crisis (Nikam, Pune, July 2009). A doorstep collection system, whether or not SWaCH administers it, can only permit the collection of waste directly from households. If PMC brings in private sector actors to handle collection and transport, the waste-pickers will be on the outside of a closed waste system. Additionally, staff at KKPKP are concerned that if PMC pursues alternative methods of disposal that do not encourage recycling—there are already two privately-operated Refuse Derived Fuel plants at Uruli Devachi (Jagtap, Pune, July 2009)—waste-picker livelihoods will be endangered (Narayan, Pune, July 2009). Thus it is crucial that SWaCH demonstrate and establish that it can and will meet solid waste management needs and that the benefits of the system outweigh the potential costs of not pursuing other approaches to collection and disposal.

Decisions from above regarding solid waste management pose a threat as well. While SWaCH enjoys support within government, national level decisions regarding appropriate technologies and facilities are often made without cohesion across governing bodies. For example, the existing RDF facilities in Pune were funded by the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM): The “Ministry of Urban Development, which is infrastructure, is going right ahead and funding large infrastructure even in waste management without...understanding or hearing people out from the urban poverty alleviation sector” (Menon, Pune, July 2009). Government bodies that are less connected to the work of KKPKP on the ground in Pune may make decisions without considering local appropriateness despite the existence of advocates on various levels. Environmental activists in Pune suggested that government decisions are often based on the availability of funds, rather than a discussion of costs and benefits, and that those selling waste-to-energy as a solution are persistent (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009, Menon, Pune, July 2009). While some departments are on board with KKPKP’s “empowerment thinking,” there are many in Indian government who are not, making it easier for vested interests to influence decision-making (Menon, Pune, July 2009). This inconsistency at various levels of the State is an obstacle to be considered.

An important way to surmount the threat of privatization is for SWaCH to clarify the fact that it, too, can improve services and keep costs low through competition, as is frequently touted by supporters of privatization and pluralization. In this case, because Pune Municipal Corporation has not actually privatized solid waste management, that is, has not completely relinquished responsibility for waste management nor guaranteed SWaCH a contract indefinitely, performance-enhancing competition still exists. SWaCH and KKPKP have already responded to the criticism from certain officials and groups in Pune that their arrangement constitutes a monopoly on doorstep collection. KKPKP leaders asserted that the centralized form of SWaCH is something that is necessary now, but could be altered in the future: “SWaCH is trying to bridge the transition...formalize the informal, therefore consolidation is necessary, because there is certain investment in terms of

data, in terms of training, in terms of management, that is best done centralized for it to be cost-effective” (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2000). At this stage, centralized administration is more intuitive and efficient, but the staff acknowledged that a way to ensure accountability and good performance is to become polycentric as the organization becomes larger and covers more households. The monopoly issue will be removed when SWaCH becomes a federation, with numerous “small entrepreneurial units,” at below the ward level (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). Though skeptical of PMC’s true motivation for monopoly accusations, KKPKP’s leaders remain committed to “good services...that are accountable to citizens...and services that are fair to labor” (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). Monopolies become a problem when they are not accountable to consumers and their own workers. An ongoing theme of this article is that organizing the informal sector as a mass group can be an important first step. Once that structure is built, like the importance of multiple linkages, multiple centers can ensure that the organization’s growth is sustainable and accountable. KKPKP’s demonstrated adaptability will greatly support this.

#### *Worker buy-in and innovation*

SWaCH represents a cost-effective solid waste management solution for PMC that also has great potential to reduce the need for welfare interventions by the municipality among the urban poor. A local activist noted that because SWaCH is pro-poor, “this is a type of privatization which probably will be more sustainable, in the social sense as well” (Menon, Pune, July 2009). Two doorstep collectors, while they were not members of KKPKP prior to joining SWaCH, described the work as desirable compared to the domestic housework they were undertaking previously, and reported working directly with waste already—a position as a doorstep collector seemed like a logical transition (Bagul, Acumite, Pune, August 2009). The existing sense of allegiance among KKPKP members and their relevant skills create demand and promote the sustainability of the cooperative. The work of a doorstep collector is often not easy, but the provision of tools, the predictability of the work, and the relative authority it endows makes the conditions better than picking waste

from public bins, and even preferable to other informal sector positions, such as washing laundry or utensils (Bagul, Acumite, Pune, August 2009). Only the number of households participating in the program dictates the need for additional doorstep collectors; Pune is so populous that positions for doorstep collectors (or in other value-added services such as composting, biogas or vermiculture management) could be virtually limitless (Jog, Pune, July 2009). The women working for SWaCH also indicated they would be happy to contribute to the future sustainability of the cooperative, if they were to earn enough to qualify (Bagul, Acumite, Pune, August 2009). These facts indicate that SWaCH and KKPKP both build feelings of solidarity and community, and that the workers see clear benefits to participation. This evidence supports the argument that though SWaCH is not currently serving every single household in Pune, its capacity to do so is not restricted by its workforce. Similarly, the fact that the members of KKPKP have emphasized that they are interested in improved occupations, not simply exit strategies, means the opportunity to graduate from waste-picker to service provider will likely remain attractive.

#### *The need for consumer buy-in and service worker capacity building*

That the costs of the program, aside from the initial promised start-up funders, are charged to the citizen directly makes SWaCH attractive to PMC; paying for doorstep collection services via a fee paid directly from the household likewise increases accountability on the part of the provider as well as the payee. “Accountability relationships between the key stakeholders in service delivery — citizens, policymakers and service providers — are not transparent, formalized or effective,” because “policymakers...do not have effective ways of holding service providers accountable,” and likewise, “in most polities there are few mechanisms for citizens to hold service providers directly accountable for service delivery” (Joshi, 2008, 12). In those cases, contractors may continue to be paid for services that are less than adequate. In the SWaCH situation, if the collector does not accomplish her task, she doesn’t receive her fee; thus there is a strong impetus for the worker to do her job properly. The World Bank recommends the “‘short route’ of accountability (directly

between citizens and providers)”) as opposed to the more traditional, electoral ‘long route’ of accountability, that is, “citizens electing policymakers who fail to check providers” (Joshi, 2008, 12). Staff at SWaCH argued that the fee system must be adhered to, instead of “another parallel municipal corporation system, where they get a fixed salary...SWaCH feels that it is better if the citizens pay the women directly,” also because it allows the household members to directly witness and understand the work the collectors are doing (Jog, Pune, July 2009). This aspect points to the superiority and importance of a system where the service provider and citizen interact closely on a regular basis.

However, this system cannot function without sufficient participation on the part of the greater citizenry, which in turn requires some amount of political will from government representatives to encourage, and if necessary, enforce participation. Though decentralization is often key to coproduction, it can be challenging to achieve effectively, especially in governments such as India which have long been characterized by weak “signals encouraging citizen input” and where “the importance of central control and direction has dominated official thinking since the end of colonialism” (Ostrom, 1996, 1081).

Convincing citizens to pay the monthly fee also entails building an appreciation of the mission of SWaCH and the work of the informal sector workers, as well as enhancing those workers’ capacity as service providers. In fact, attempting direct enforcement on the part of the local government could be disastrous—perhaps why government at the ward level, specifically councilors and health officials, have been reluctant to penalize citizens who fail to pay (Jog, Pune, July 2009). For this to occur, the municipal government needs to be more proactive and supportive, and fulfill its agreements to SWaCH—for example, providing the promised fee subsidy for households in slums to receive the doorstep collection service. KKPKP staff noted that not all households have to pay for services in a neighborhood for everyone to receive the benefits of collection, but “it has to be more people moving towards payment, and just a nominal minority not paying...One needs to use a multiplicity of incentives and penalties to get citizens to comply with something”



(Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). If the households don't pay, the waste-picker loses income and doorstep collection becomes less attractive than picking from the bins (Jog, Pune, July 2009). This trade-off is likely more heightened in slum areas, which tend to generate more wet waste, which is heavier. This makes the job both more difficult for doorstep collectors, and less financially rewarding in terms of the collection of scrap. Thus it is particularly problematic that PMC has not delivered on their agreement to subsidize doorstep collection by 50% for households in slums. Though SWaCH and PMC have laid a strong foundation for successful coproduction of a more efficient, ecological and equitable system of solid waste management, it is yet to be seen if PMC is willing to send the proper signals to households.

Though the government might attempt to mandate accountability on the part of the waste generator, this type of face-to-face service provision is most effective when there is mutual trust and appreciation between the service provider and the consumer (Tendler, Freedheim, 1994). In the case of SWaCH, trust is diminished when the waste generator obeys in segregating her waste, and then observes the waste-picker throwing the carefully segregated wet waste into a municipal waste bin as occurs in some places where a feeder system is not in place. "The municipality needs to...ensure that the streams are maintained because consumers are more willing to segregate when they see that the separate streams are maintained and they benefit" (Chikarmane, Pune, August 2009). These flaws in the system are not the only disincentives. Many residents resent the new system because they see solid waste management as a responsibility of the municipal government, which they should not be forced to pay extra for, even if the result is a superior system, socially as well as environmentally (Gadgil, Pune, July 2009). PMC should ensure that the proper facilities are in place and needs to increase either outreach or penalties to improve citizen participation.

The SWaCH staff cited examples of wards where coverage has been strong thanks to better education and enforcement in regards to citizens and their role in paying and segregating. "Now that the Aundh office has taken a stand like this now the citizens have no choice left but to segregate and start disposing their own waste and

participating in the waste disposal system” (Jog, Pune, July 2009). Furthermore, representatives of PMC have hitherto seemed reluctant to properly educate the public of the fact that without SWaCH PMC would not be able to effectively serve the entire city, for reasons perhaps of pride as much as politics (Jog, Pune, July 2009). The program cannot be implemented very successfully without buy-in from the municipal employees. If the residents in the ward are “not positive about our role,” it is understandably harder to get the “municipal corporation officers in that ward” to cooperate with SWaCH (Jog, Pune, July 2009). The waste-picker as a mechanism of citizen accountability is only so useful if the government is not willing to act on the information she relays—that is, penalize and educate households who do not pay or properly segregate.

The creation of citizen buy-in also requires building rapport between doorstep collectors and the public, or effectively shoring up the recent erosion of citizen sympathy for waste-pickers. As stated by one of the founders:

We had suspected this would happen. When we started work 10 years, 15 years ago, waste-pickers were collecting waste from the bins and containers and were not interfacing with citizens on a daily basis at all. It's very easy for any service recipient like a middle class citizen to...feel a sympathy factor for them. But, when the person starts going to their house every day and is offering a service where punctuality and regularity and behaving in a particular way is expected and they find that they are...not living up to every single part of it, then what becomes more important to them is not that they too are violating this kind of contract in many ways, the citizens themselves, but what's important is that this person is not sticking to a commitment, and therefore they are not looking at the larger picture anymore...Right now definitely there is a lot much more strong, let's say criticism or opposition to waste-pickers about small things to do with their actual work habits (Narayan, Pune, July 2009).

This declining sympathy is one of the trade-offs of organization and formalization. In allying with the municipality in order to form SWaCH, distrust may replace sympathy, as the interests of the waste-picker turned doorstep collector now appear at odds with the interests of the middle-class resident being asked to pay. If and when true citizen buy-in occurs, only then will PMC fully realize the true benefits of the SWaCH collaboration. Public and private sector synergy, as opposed to either

group attempting to work alone, can be an effective development strategy because “the actions of public agencies facilitate forging norms of trust and networks of civic engagement among ordinary citizens and using these norms and networks for developmental ends. Engaged citizens are a source of discipline and information for public agencies as well as on-the-ground assistance in the implementation of public projects”(Evans, 1996, 1034). Evans also raises the potential challenge of consumer buy-in: “The effective delivery (or coproduction) of public services is only valued if citizens reactions make a difference in the eyes of government leaders” (Evans, 1996, 1129). The predominance of citizens who see waste-pickers as contrary to their personal goals is very real. This must be amended for SWaCH to succeed in the long term.

SWaCH’s response is to increase the capacity of the women as service providers and reduce individual-level conflict between collector and consumer. “We also have a very big training component in our work...they have to go on time, they have to dress neatly, they have to talk courteously” (Jog, Pune, July 2009). SWaCH staff also aim to train the collectors to understand their importance in the larger system—before they had one purpose, to generate income, whereas now they are “contributing to the waste management chain” (Jog, Pune, 2009). Though the social orientation of SWaCH is one of its clear benefits, and a marketing opportunity to bring community members on board, SWaCH is foremost a service provider, and must offer something that is worth paying for in order to remain competitive and sustainable, a point that is not lost on its CEO (Bahora, Pune, July 2009). This is another development aim of SWaCH, to create a mechanism of income generation and improved status that does not rely on charity or sympathy alone.

In the conclusion that follows I will clarify the capacity of SWaCH to overcome these challenges and obstacles, because of the unique adaptability and capacity for innovation it inherited from its parent organization of KKPKP. I will also draw out some replicable lessons for similar endeavors in the cities of the developing world.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusions**

The purpose of this paper was not only to understand how the integration of informal sector waste workers into formal processes can have great social, economic and environmental pay-offs, but also how this integration might be achieved. To that end, I have discussed the key organizations, institutions and individuals who shaped the 20-year trajectory of the waste-picker union, KKPKP, as well as fostered the recent emergence of SWaCH, the flagship cooperative solid waste service provider created in collaboration with the Pune Municipal Corporation.

In the beginning, SNDT Women's University was clearly important in supporting the activists, Poornima Chikarmane and Lakshmi Narayan, who came to organize the local waste-picker population and mobilize them into an effective and prominent union. By sustaining the early project with monetary resources and later lending the union's lobbying work the added credibility of an academic institution, the university created a space in which the relationships that built the organization, between the waste-pickers and activists, as well as between the nascent program and other dominant institutions, could be formed.

A second important foundation for the SWaCH partnership was the union's engagement, early on, of the Pune Municipal Corporation. By immediately and persistently seeking recognition and endorsement of waste-pickers as workers, KKPKP achieved greater social acceptance for its members and built ties with key actors within the corporation. The negotiation of these ties enabled the union's great volume of achievements, from access to benefits such as health insurance, to improved income and agency via the cooperative scrap shop, to the later creation of the doorstep collection enterprise of SWaCH that would grant tens of hundreds of waste-pickers enhanced and stable occupations. Unlike many NGOs who eschew engaging with government out of a fear of becoming bureaucratized and co-opted by the State (Sanyal, 1997), KKPKP proactively forged a productive relationship

with the municipal government, maintaining autonomy as well as reciprocity through the simultaneous approaches of agitation and appeal. Through its fieldwork and publications, KKPKP clarified the economic and environmental contributions of waste-pickers in municipal operations, and developed this evidence to illustrate an even more productive mechanism for improvement and reform of solid waste management, embodied by SWaCH.

Central to all of this was KKPKP's sequential and incremental approach to social improvement, which instead of employing predetermined assumptions about the needs of its constituents, actively engaged them in establishing the union's activities and goals and drew on their knowledge and experience to implement them. KKPKP's leaders remained open and agile in engaging with external opportunities and barriers. Rooted in the experiences of its members, the union collaborated with a range of institutions, and its leaders immersed themselves in various projects, from doorstep collection pilots, to understanding urban waste generation and management, to explorations of the environmental impacts of various service approaches, which established credibility as well as built capacity to respond and evolve. Because of this crucial knowledge and field experience, and the strength of its relationships which were formed via contestation as much as academic research and diplomacy, the union was well-poised to propose the organization of SWaCH and publicly demonstrate its efficacy and worth.

The fact that numerous simultaneous factors were at play in the course of KKPKP's development confirms that processes such as the successful institution of SWaCH are non-linear. One of the key conditions that supported the formation of SWaCH was the institution of the MSW 2000 Rules by the Central Government of India, which assisted in creating both the perceived need and an entry point for the organized informal sector workers to fill a gap in municipal service provision. The Rules, which KKPKP itself helped shape, generated a space in which the State, KKPKP and the greater community could negotiate and devise a solid waste management response which increased financial sustainability as well as created multiple layers of accountability, and the will within the local government to act.

This process led to the innovation of SWaCH because sectorally knowledgeable groups such as KKPKP were drawn in as grass-roots experts on informal solid waste management and as qualified service intermediaries. Enlightened bureaucrats within the Pune Municipal Corporation collaborated with these groups to actively shape the implementation and design of the program that became SWaCH.

What are the implications of this story for urban planners? Planners have long been preoccupied with effective public service provision. The various approaches, from monolithic State provision, to pluralization, to privatization, have proved to contain various drawbacks and limits to accountability and efficiency (Joshi, Moore, 2004). Though many have discarded the public-private partnership model as reducing autonomy as well as accountability, this case highlights the possibility of fruitful collaboration between the informal sector and municipal governments to coproduce and provide crucial public services. Many have acknowledged that the informal sector presents a frequently ignored and untapped resource for the public sector, not just for the labor it provides, but also for its expertise and knowledge (Ostrom, 1996). Similarly, while the State is often over-extended, the involvement of planners in the informal sector is necessary, as neither the market nor the community alone can create substantial improvements in livelihoods and security (Sanyal, 2008). As poverty alleviation and service provision are primary concerns of planners in developing countries, the SWaCH case is extremely useful in devising future approaches that can address both, in a cost-effective and socially equitable way.

This case study confirms various suggestions in the literature that to this point have lacked clear and compelling examples of success, and thus offers some lesson for policy development. First, it demonstrates the value of partial or gradual formalization of existing groups, drawing on informal sector mechanisms and resources without pushing the members into unfamiliar or constrictive arrangements. The fact that the informal sector is present everywhere in India, if not the entire developing world, is a compelling argument for gradually scaling up solutions such as the SWaCH arrangement. Social capital and “soft technologies” of institutional change can produce results well out of proportion to the resources

required to implement them” (Evans, 1996, 1034). A vast workforce contributing to municipal coproduction in such a way that the benefits far outweigh the costs is a tremendous resource. One lesson provided by KKPKP and SWaCH is that this vulnerable and marginalized workforce can be successfully integrated into formal systems for the betterment of both.

Integration of the informal sector into municipal service provision works, but this paper also demonstrates the particular effectiveness of an organization that fosters a multitude of linkages and approaches. KKPKP was so successful due to its ability to recognize and leverage various incentives and apply a variety of advocacy and lobbying approaches, all while maintaining a direct connection to its grassroots, mass base. This case also suggests unique aspects of the organization that enhanced these familiar approaches, including: a lack of political affiliation; vigilance regarding the perspectives of groups other than the target population; and a willingness of the institution to become polycentric, as evinced by the creation of the SWaCH cooperative as a separate, jointly forged entity. These features promote innovation instead of stagnation and ease the negotiation of the system changes that are necessary to effective service provision as well as pro-poor development.

While a commitment to poverty alleviation on the part of local government clearly aided this collaboration, more important was the push to meet quantifiable and well-defined mandates from above. The fact that PMC met these standards with the assistance of a waste-picker union is compelling, as few examples exist of attempts to tap the informal sector in fulfilling local government responsibilities. While the Pune context, and the qualities of the individuals involved, such as NGO leaders and municipal officials, clearly played a role, this case shows that they are not the primary determinants. It is far more important for planners to promote organizations and processes that enable cross-sectoral collaboration and political buy-in to achieve the twin goals of improved basic services and social development.

The goal of this case study is ultimately to stimulate discussion and examination not solely for the pressing problem of solid waste management in developing countries,

but other areas of goods and services where the informal sector has been stockpiling expertise for generations, but is still overwhelmingly ignored and frequently underserved. Clearly, planners need to continue to examine and identify ways in which the informal sector can complement public service provision, and how the skills and expertise of the informal sector as well as civil society can be harnessed to not only improve the State's ability to meet its responsibilities, but to also upgrade conditions and livelihoods for precisely those citizens.



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