

# CHILD RAGPICKERS

## I. Ragpicking in India: a general overview

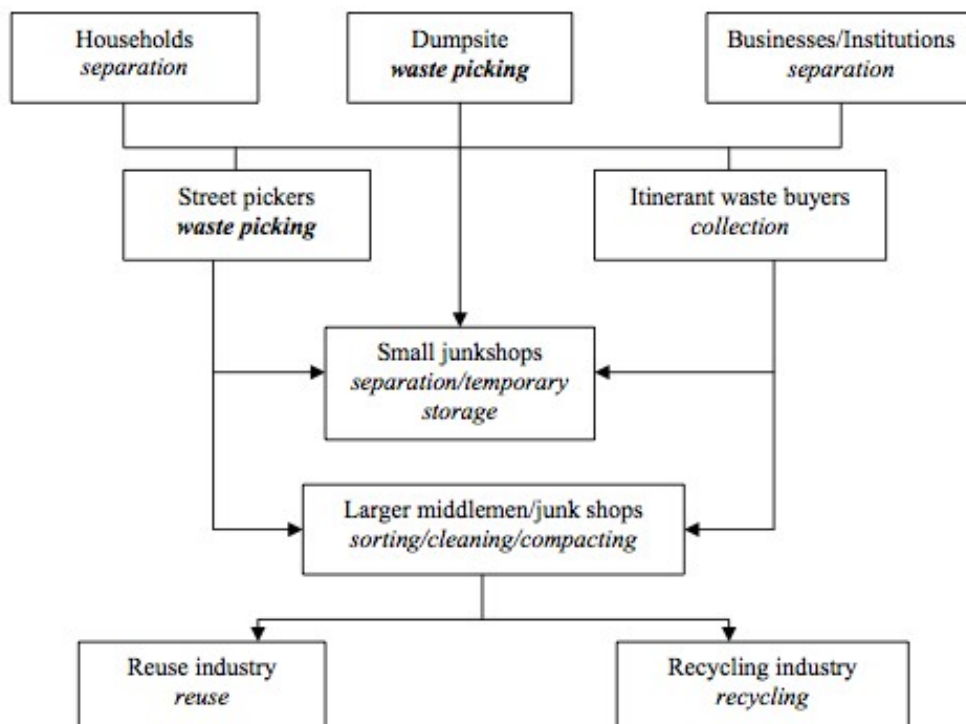
### A. What is ragpicking?

India's booming urbanization brings the problem of waste management. As more people are migrating towards the cities, the amount of waste is increasing at a high pace and waste management is likely to become a critical issue in the coming years.

Ragpickers play an important, but usually unrecognised role in the waste management system of Indian cities. They collect garbage in search of recyclable items that can be sold to scrap merchant (paper, plastic, tin...) This activity require no skills and is a source of income for a growing number of urban poor.

There are two types of scrap-collectors: the ragpickers, mostly women, who collect garbage on dumping grounds, in residential areas or in street bins, and the itinerant buyers who purchase scrap directly from households, offices and shops. Most of the itinerant buyers are male and they typically require a certain amount of capital to purchase scrap.

### The informal waste sector



Most of the ragpickers are not independent but work for middlemen or contractors who purchase segregated rag from them on pre-decided rates.

Waste picking is rarely recognized or integrated in the official Waste Management System despite its large contribution to it. According to the NGO Chintan, ragpickers “are unrecognized and have almost no rights to work, despite the fact that they save almost 14% of the municipal budget annually. In Delhi, the army of almost 80,000 estimated wastepickers save the city at least Rs. 6 lakh daily through their work.”

## ***B. Who are the ragpickers?***

In India, over a million people find livelihood opportunities through waste picking. Chintan’s research shows that “as many as one in a hundred persons in a large city in India could be employed in waste recycling, starting from waste picking to operating small junk shops and even operating reprocessing factories. Of these, most are marginalized wastepickers and small waste dealers.”

Ragpickers are mostly women who come from the most marginalised groups of the population and often live in unauthorised slums in the poorest neighbourhood.

Studies also show that ragpickers are most of the time migrants who had fled their city or village because of hard living conditions. The vast majority of the ragpickers are Dalits or belong to minorities (muslims in Kolkatta). In UP, Assamese and the Biharis have by and large dominated the profession in the last two decades.

The fact that they are migrants and often seen as temporary residents can explain why few governments have designed policies to improve their situation. Most of them don’t have identity cards or birth certificate and therefore don’t have access to basic governmental facilities (social assistance, enrolment of their children in municipal schools...)

## ***C. Some improvements in their work conditions***

Many NGOs are supporting the ragpickers to gain access to these basic services (health care, health insurance, education and vocational training). They also provide legal support or counselling sessions and help them form unions to speak up for their rights.

In some cities, their work has been partly recognized and their situation thus improved. In Pune for example, thanks to the scrap-collectors union, the municipal corporation now issues identity cards to ragpickers and offers a limited health insurance plan, recognising their contribution to recycling waste in the city

This acknowledgement can have a positive impact on reducing child labour by increasing the parent’s income therefore reducing their dependence on the money their children earn.

# **II. Child labour and ragpicking**

## ***A. Background of the child ragpickers***

Many children begin working as ragpickers at the young age of five or six years. In Lucknow,

the majority of the ragpickers are between 8 and 10 years old. Most of them never attend school and don't have any formal education. Their families are generally in need of extra incomes from their children.

There are two categories of child ragpickers: the street pickers, who collect garbage in street bins or residential areas, and dump pickers who work on dumping grounds. These two categories of children do not have the same living conditions and characteristics.

Street pickers, mostly boys, share many characteristics with other street children: they are extremely mobile and it's therefore difficult to gain access to them. What they usually need is a shelter or reintegration with their families. In most cases, the children work for a middleman who takes the major share of the sales and pays only a small amount to the children.

On the other hand, the dump pickers often live with their families, in a relatively more stable environment. They usually work with their parents in or around the dumping ground.

Girls were traditionally more involved in ragpicking than boys, but a survey in Pune shows that the trends are changing and that more boys are now engaged in the trade.

Adolescent girls are less involved in ragpicking because it is believed to be unsafe for them to be out on the street. They are involved in taking care of the house chores and help in sorting the collected garbage from home.

Some of the child ragpickers go to school and work the other part of the day or during holidays. Some girls are found working as ragpickers in the morning, sometimes attending school in the afternoon and coming back home in the evening to help their mother with the household chores or to care for their younger siblings.

### ***B.State of the legislation***

In 2001, waste-picking was included among the hazardous occupations banned under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986. But apart from this very brief mention, ragpicking is ignored in legislation regarding child labour.

Contrary to most child labourers, ragpickers are self-employed or working with their parents and therefore not answerable to any employer.

### III. Impact of ragpicking on the life of children

#### **A. Health issues**

##### **1. Long working hours**

Normally children work in one shift only but some of the children are collecting rag two to three times in a day. Those who are involved in collection of empty bottles work late in the night.

In Lucknow, younger children, especially girls, start their work early in the morning and till 12-1pm. Teen age boys start working around 8-9 am till 2-3 pm.

##### **2. Hazardous work conditions**

Ragpicking is probably one of the most dangerous and dehumanizing activity in India. Child ragpickers are working in filthy environments, surrounded by crows or dogs under any weather conditions and have to search through hazardous waste without gloves or shoes.

They often eat the filthy food remnants they find in the garbage bins or in the dumping ground. Using the dumping ground as a playing field the children run the risk to come upon needles, syringes, used condoms, saline bottles, soiled gloves and other hospital wastes as well as ample of plastic and iron items.

They suffer from many diseases, such as respiratory problems, worms, anaemia, fever and other problems which include cuts, rashes, dog bites...

#### **B. Education issues**

A large majority of the child ragpickers are out of school children, despite the presence of schools in their neighbourhood.

In Lucknow for example, 98% children of the school going age group are not going to school.

In the M-East ward of Mumbai, there are 15 municipal schools but the number of out of school children is yet very high. Most of the children are withdrawn from school at the average age of 12-13 years. The boys often work in their parents' business while the girls are made to take up the household responsibility.

#### **Case Study – Lucknow**

Fazila, 11 years old, has 3 brothers. Her father died some year back and her mother is weak and gets sick very often. She and her 12-year-old brother are the two most responsible person of the family.

Fazila's day begins early morning, she cooks rice, prepare tea and goes with his brother to Dalibagh, Hazratganj and Lalbagh for rag picking.

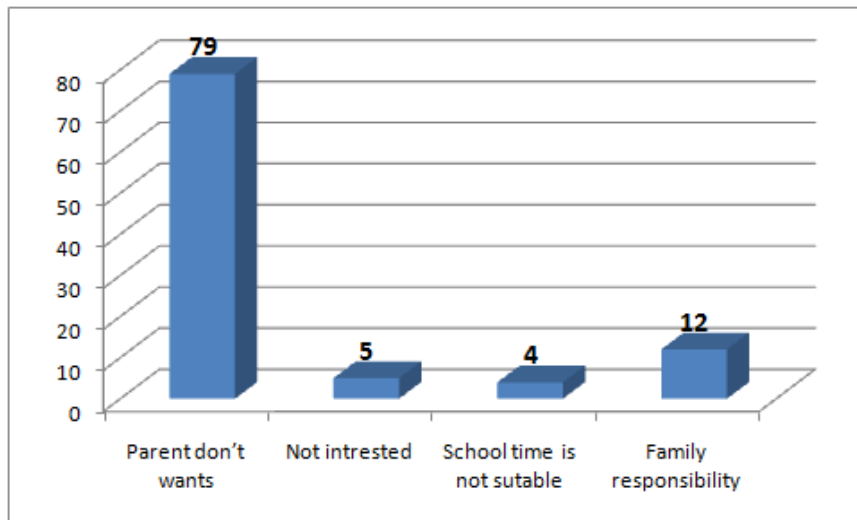
She returns home when sun is high in the sky. After taking bath and meal she looks after her younger brother. Around 3 pm she starts second round of rag picking and comes back around 7 PM. She cooks the evening meal and does other house hold work.

She dreams to become teacher but hardly find any time to go to school. She wants to play with the doll, which she found during her daily rag collection. She is growing up and has lots of questions but no one to answer them.

She dreams of collecting lots of money and going back to Assam and think of the days when no one forced her for rag picking and she would play with dolls and friends.

But rag picking and 12 to 13 hours of working is reality and she has to work hard for supporting her family.

Different reason can explain why the children are not going to school. The following table gives details about the situation in Lucknow:



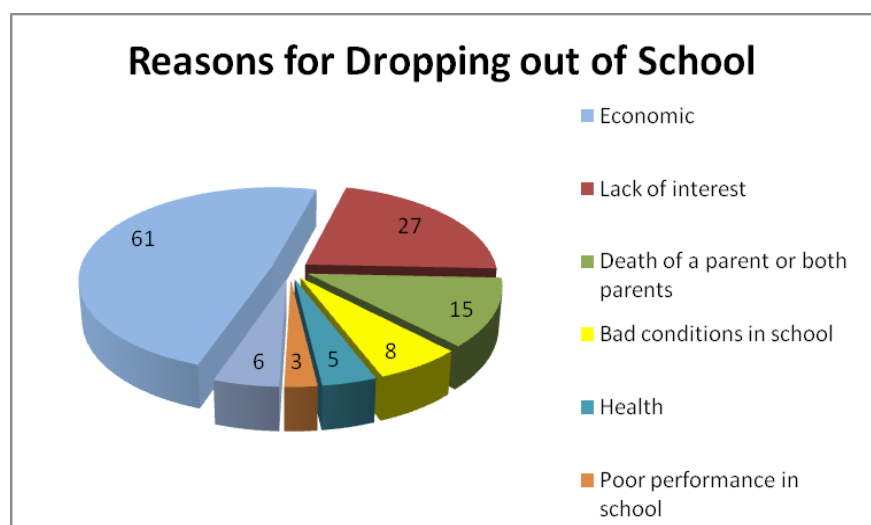
79% children are out of school because neither their parents nor the contractor [for whom they are working] are interested in

sending them to school. Moreover, many children are already making quite a lot of money by ragpicking and don't see the point of going to school.

- 12% say that they are responsible for their family and have to work.
- 5% children left school because they do not found anything interesting in the school and they feel that teachers are not teaching properly and they cannot afford private school fees.
- 4% of the children are not going to school because their school hours didn't allow them to go to work.

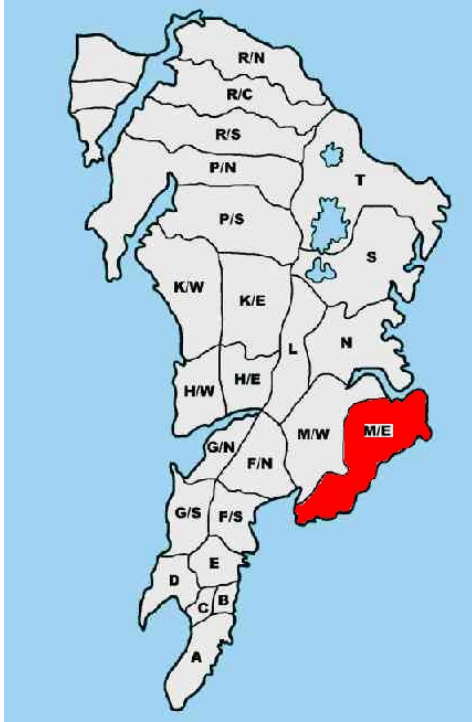
Language is also a big barrier, as migrant children often don't speak the language of the city they work in.

In a study conducted in Pune, migration, quality of school, corporal punishment in school, not interesting, failed more than twice in the class, bad health, economic hardship of the family, loss of a parent are some of the reasons also cited for school dropouts.



## IV.Pratham's intervention: the case of Govandi (Mumbai)

### A.Situation in Govandi



According to the SSA Survey Data 2004, 60% of working and out of school children are in the M/E ward of Mumbai city.

The M/E ward is divided broadly into two main slum communities - Bainganwadi and Shivaji nagar. These are like any other slum communities. There is a gathering of closely built homes, unmaintained roads, overflowing drains, freely roaming cattle and groups of people chatting at each corner.

The approximate population in these communities is around 5 lakhs and majority of the population are followers of Islam. Another main characteristic of this community (though negative) is its closeness to Mumbai's largest dumping ground – The Deonar Dumping Ground.

Mumbai generates waste of approximately 7,025 tonnes per day. The management of waste in the city comes under the Municipal Corporation of Greater

Mumbai (MCGM). The prevailing approach is that of collection of garbage from the communities by the municipal authorities and disposing it off at the three main dumping sites that are currently servicing the city.

Deonar is the largest dumping ground in Mumbai. It starts from the Deonar creek and ends at Baba Nagar.

This dumping ground area has added on to the developmental and infrastructural issues faced in M/E. For years Deonar has been the largest garbage bin for the entire Mumbai city and today is also is a home for thousands of migrants who live in very hard conditions, lacking even the most basic amenities and earning their living on the dumping ground.

In July 2008, Pratham conducted a survey in and around the dumping ground to assess the situation of the children living there. The following table presents the results of this survey:

	Total No.	In School		Out of School		In & out of School – Working Children	In & out of School - Not working Children
		Working	Not Working	Working	Not Working		
Boys	957	288	300	288	81	576	381

Girls	368	82	178	64	44	146	222
<b>Total</b>	<b>1325</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>603</b>
						<b>1325</b>	

There are approximately 1300 children living in and around the dumping ground today on a regular basis. All of them are living with their families and have either migrated or been displaced from other parts of Mumbai.

636 are working as ragpickers, of which half are going to school. The majority of the children earn up to 100 rupees a day while 2 or 3 of them are making as much as 800 rupees a day. (476 earn 100 or less than 100 rupees a day, 111 earn between 100 and 400 rupees a day and 5 earn 400 rupees or more)

The objective of Pratham's intervention is to provide educational opportunities to child ragpickers, as well as relief from their routine work in a safe, caring environment and to generate their interest in school-related activities.

### ***B.Educational classes***

There have been joint initiatives with the Government so as to tackle the issue of child rag pickers. One of the major programs through which these children are covered is the Transitional Education Centres (TEC's) run under the INDUS program of the Government.

There are 11 TEC's surrounding the dumping ground in Govandi reaching about 450 children, many of which work part time as rag pickers.

### ***C.Vocational skill training***

The objective of the vocational training is to provide vulnerable children with employable or business skills and allow them to be able to survive / support themselves and their families after reaching an employable age.

Pratham offers vocational training or refer children to other organizations that provide training. Two vocational skill training classes are organized for adolescent girls and provide them with basic life skills such as mehendi or tailoring.

### ***D.Mainstreaming these children into school***

In December 2006 Hindustan Lever Limited adopted 45 children from Govandi area under their Scholarship drive to support the education of underprivileged children. Under this project the company is sponsoring their school education as well as a support class run by Pratham.

Pratham's teachers relentlessly worked to convince the parents to send their children to school and to Pratham's support classes. They organized parents meetings, counselling sessions and home visits to tell them about the importance of education.

Many parents argued that sending their children to school was a loss of revenue but the teachers gave them advice on how to manage without their children's additional revenue. Slowly the parents began taking an interest in their children's education and supporting Pratham's initiative.

Pratham started with a four-hour class aimed at raising the children's interest for educational activities. Once the children and the parents were ready, they contacted the school and managed to enrol the children. The support class was set up to provide the child with educational support for retention in school.

### ***E. The Drop-in-centre model***

Alongside its education program, Pratham also started the first drop in centre for the children working on the dumping ground.

The Drop in centre is the major strategy and a non controversial entry point program to tackle the issue of working children on the dumping ground. It is a low cost and replicable model which caters to the immediate needs of the working children on the dumping ground.

This safe point of contact for children is key to their reintegration into education and vocational training, and a first step toward a better future.

#### **1. What is a Drop In Centre**

A place within the radius of 1 km of the workplace wherein the children working on the dumping ground (who do not have a fixed routine or schedule) can drop in between 10.00 am and 5.00 pm.

It would be a place which would cater to the child's recreational needs and the need to take rest. It would consist of basic play material like carom boards, board games, puzzles, colours and drawing sheets along with a television set. A child will be free to drop in at any time of the day and depending on his/her mood the child might choose the activity. Once the children regularly start coming to the drop in centre simple sessions would be planned and slowly the educational classes would start. Later these children would be covered through the educational programs and convinced to go to school.

#### **2. Objective**

The main objective of the drop in centre is to provide the children with a better

alternative to keep them away from work on the dumping ground. This centre would be the child's first contact with Pratham, wherein the child would be given an opportunity to do what he/she feels like doing. The major objective is to keep the child away from work and through different techniques gradually getting the child into the education net.

In the initial days the Pratham staff would go to the dumping ground and talk to the children for hours together so as to convince them to visit the centre. There were cases of children who came and slept for hours in the centre. Some children would drop in and play some games, some would paint and some would prefer watching the television.

Every day the teacher at the centre was a silent observer and a facilitator of all these activities.

After the initial days of rapport building, the teachers slowly began to talk to the children about basics like hygiene and cleanliness. There were sessions where all children were asked to bathe at the centre, their nails were cut and the hair was cut after which they would be shown the mirror. The children would jump out in joy after looking at the transformation in their appearance and this was our first step in making a difference in their lives.

Slowly the educational classes began and the children were convinced to go to school after attaining their age appropriate competencies.

### **3.Services to be provided**

- **Recreation and entertainment**

- 1) Games (board games, puzzles, clay, blocks etc)
- 2) Television
- 3) Opportunities to participate in competitions and workshops, and interacting with role models/personalities
- 4) Organized games in nearby playgrounds
- 5) All important national and religious festivals shall be celebrated.

- **Educational**

- 1) Baseline tests will be conducted for assessing educational levels once the child is in the
- 2) Based on the results of the above tests the child will be inducted into appropriate learning groups.

- 3) Non formal education through learning groups enabling the child to get back into mainstream (Municipal/Government) schools at the earliest.
- 4) Children with learning levels of Standard 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> shall be helped to appear for examinations through National Open School (NOS)/ National Institute of Open School (NIOS).
- 5) All children into formal education to be given extra coaching through support classes.
- 6) Monthly school follow up to be done by the staff to track the progress of the child.
- 7) For children interested in further education support shall be created through scholarships, sponsorship programs and referrals.

- **Pre Vocational**

- 1) Art, craft and flower making for all children.
- 2) Dance and Music classes weekly once for all children.
- 3) Special coaching for talented children in the above field.
- 4) Age appropriate computer literacy shall be provided.

- **Counseling**

- 1) Regular dialogue with the children to motivate them for an attitudinal change.
- 2) Detailed case study of each child will be maintained post counselling.
- 3) The behavioural and attitudinal changes will be reorded from time to time.
- 4) Referrals in case of difficulties in handling some children.

- **Medical**

- 1) First aid box to be available at the drop in centre.
- 2) Medical check up would be done for the children in the drop in centre.
- 3) Regular monthly check ups for all children.
- 4) Immediate referrals to the nearby Clinics/Government hospitals for sick children.

#### **4.Looking forward**

During our work in Govandi for the past three years we have realized that the drop in centre model was a very effective one for the children working on the dumping ground. But due to the shortage of resources were unable to replicate it.

We are now planning to have around 5 drop in centres at major entry points on the dumping ground which would cater to the children working on it.

A larger, permanent centre is also a crucial need of this community. Pratham needs to have a centre that will cater different needs like education, health, counseling

(marital, job placement, legal guidance etc), computer education, larger scale income generation and training.