

## **#6 DEVELOPING THE CAPACITY OF LOWER GRADES OF MUNICIPAL STAFF IN INDIA**

by Sanjay K Gupta<sup>1</sup> & S A Khader Saheb<sup>2</sup>

### **1. Introduction**

This is a story of two small municipalities of Andhra Pradesh, India, namely Suryapet and Eluru. Suryapet has a population of 109,000 and is a class II municipality whilst Eluru has a population of 305,000 and is a class I municipality. A small initiative in 2001, introducing door-to-door collection of waste in Suryapet, led to a series of consultations and subsequently a training needs assessment and capacity building of the municipal staff in all aspects of sanitation, but focusing primarily on solid waste management. The experience in Suryapet was transferred to a bigger municipality, Eluru, to see whether it could be replicated, scaled up and sustained. This paper provides vital clues regarding what is needed to improve solid waste management services, and brings to the fore the fact that a comprehensive training needs assessment and capacity development of the lower levels of municipal staff (manual workers and their foremen) are more critical to upgrading waste management than similar interventions at higher levels in the organisation.

### **2. History of solid waste management in the two towns**

Both Suryapet and Eluru were considered to be the dirtiest towns in their respective categories. Among administration officials, it was considered a punishment to be transferred to either of these towns. Seldom had a commissioner stayed there for more than a year. It was discovered that the lower grades of municipal staff had received no training for almost a decade. They were completely unaware of the Municipal Solid Waste Rules 2000 and other relevant recently promulgated laws concerning solid waste management (SWM). Many of them had not received any sort of training concerning the rules and regulations that apply to SWM. When training workshops were organised, it was the Commissioner, the Health Officer or the engineering staff who attended. Technical training on landfilling and waste treatment was only for the engineering staff and the Commissioner, and no thought was given to building the capacity of the lower grades of municipal staff.

---

1 Sanjay K Gupta has worked with both the mentioned case studies in this paper for training need assessment and as an expert on capacity development for PSP and Bin Free City

2 S A Khader has worked for more than 30 years in various capacity in municipal offices and is currently Municipal Commissioner of Eluru Municipal Corporation, Andhra Pradesh, India

### **3. The first phase of capacity development of lower grades of municipal staff**

#### **3.1 History of training and capacity development for municipal staff**

A cursory look at the various training programmes organised by the state government, central government, the two relevant ministries (Ministry of Urban Development and Ministry of Environment and Forests) showed that in almost all workshops the participants were either commissioners or engineers, regardless of whether the training was concerned with best practices, public-private partnerships or improvements in collection and transport. The knowledge gained at these workshops was seldom passed on to the staff who were actually implementing the services. A discussion with the staff of these two municipalities revealed that they were never been involved in any planning process for a new initiative, nor were they ever called to give their opinion on any matter related to SWM. They also said that they were completely unaware of the concept and examples of good practice.

#### **3.2 Meetings and consultations with field staff**

##### 3.2.1 Training needs assessment

The Commissioner initiated an informal training needs assessment involving two consultants to determine what capacity development was required so that relevant state rules and regulation with regard to SWM could be implemented. One of the consultants was shocked to hear the Suryapet Commissioner himself confess that he was not aware of any central government rules on SWM, in particular the Municipal Solid Waste Rules 2000. When handed a copy of these Rules, he realised that his initiative was in line with some of the main requirements of these Rules – door-to-door collection, segregation and treatment.

A series of consultations was initiated with the field staff, to explain the objectives of the new initiative and how they could be achieved. It was the first time that the field staff had understood why the initiative had been decided upon, how it would be paid for, and what their exact roles and responsibilities would be in this initiative. Many of their suggestions were given high priority, showing clearly that a good planning process needs inputs from the field staff, and that these suggestions are often more innovative. Participation in planning develops a healthy sense of ownership at the implementation stage. Stephen R Covey said “without involvement, there is no commitment”. People at all levels want significant involvement. And if they don’t have that involvement, they are not serious about their work. It also challenged for the first time that often repeated cliché that municipalities do not have enough manpower and finances to implement and improve SWM activities. An assessment showed that both the municipalities had at least enough manpower to carry out the proposed activities. The problem was that there had never been an attempt to assess manpower requirements and to give clear roles and responsibilities to the staff. As a result they often had little or no work to do or they were required to repeat the work done by others.

##### 3.2.2 Meetings with the chairperson and elected representatives on the Municipal Council

It was also found that without the active support of the elected municipal councillors, who often come from different political parties, it is difficult to garner finances as well as

acceptance of the general public for the plans. A series of meetings, at which information and practical considerations concerning SWM were discussed, inspired them too to achieve more than other municipalities in improving the standards of SWM in their town. Exposure trips organised for the elected councillors from both Suryapet and Eluru led to continuous support for the initiatives. It became clear that any success in implementing improvements in SWM depended on the solid support of the councils, and it is vital to keep them informed about every decision and development.

### **3.3 Sharing knowledge regarding the regulatory framework**

The initial training organised both for the field staff and for the elected members of the council was concerned with providing information on the rules and regulations that had been framed by the state and central governments, and on interpreting them. For the majority of them it was the first time that they had heard about the MSW Rules and the provisions contained in them. Many of them had not even looked into their own municipal laws and by-laws, which are critical to the implementation of any initiative. (In India, municipalities can frame their own by-laws to carry out new initiatives or complete other improvements within the framework set by state and central governments.)

Within one year of the start of the capacity development inputs, it was found that there was more ownership of the work, probably as a result of the clear definition of roles and responsibilities. The towns were divided into zones and a sanitation inspector was allocated to each zone to ensure that the planned tasks were completed. Since these sanitation inspectors had previously been part of the planning process, they took ownership of the implementation process and ensured that required public support was generated – a factor which had clearly been missing earlier.

### **3.4 Individual leadership but institutional capacity development**

Though both these initiatives derived from the Commissioner's own motivation to do something different and create a replicable model, he was convinced that without institutional capacity building such initiatives would not be sustainable but would remain functional only as long as he was there as Commissioner. So his strategy was to build the capacity of each and every staff member involved in SWM. After some time, the Chairperson and the Commissioner appeared to be working more as facilitators rather than as decision-makers. This transfer of decision-making power from the top to the middle and lower rank officials generated much confidence and ownership.

### **3.5 Lack of motivation and commitment in the staff**

The initial training needs assessment revealed that the staff had little motivation and commitment to complete any new initiative. The reason was that they were often asked to undertake work without any explanation of the reasons for the work and its objectives. They rarely understood why a particular activity had been initiated. Devoid of any clear-cut responsibilities and not understanding the larger objectives, it is not surprising that they felt very little motivation and commitment. It is important to understand here that without complete involvement of all the staff, there is little motivation.

## **4. The second phase of the capacity development:**

### **4.1 The growth of participation**

#### 4.1.1 Curiosity leads to innovation

After six months of the initial capacity development programme, which concentrated mainly on the rules, regulations and by-laws governing SWM, it was found that many of the staff were eager to know what could be done with organic waste, how compost is produced, what are the different types of composting, and so on. These were new questions which the staff had never before asked or expressed any interest in. Similarly many of the staff volunteered innovative suggestions about segregation and the selection of the place where a composting operation could be set up.

Taking a cue from these questions raised by the staff, technical training in recycling and composting was organised. These training sessions proved to be very useful as many of them already knew about composting activities carried out in their native rural areas, albeit by other name. Gradually, results of the varied activities led to improvisation and improvements in the waste management system, helping the town to become a model for the state.

#### 4.1.2 Municipal staff as awareness builders:

Prior to this initiative of building the capacity of the lower grades of municipal staff, it was seldom thought that they could become agents of awareness building, but this is what happened. They visited each house and shop and explained to the citizens about segregation and objectives of their current programme to clean up the city, recycling and composting. Seeing municipal staff themselves coming to their houses and shops, their instructions and requests were taken to be more as an order from the municipality rather than as a request. This showed that involving municipal staff in raising awareness produces better results than using members of external non-governmental agencies.

### **4.2 Building Partnerships with industrial and market associations**

When the Municipality realized that they did not have enough funds to buy certain items that they wished to distribute to households and shops – such as waste bins and awareness materials – they initiated dialogues with market and industrial associations. Members of these associations had already seen the impacts of the new initiatives in SWM in both towns, as well as the new, active involvement of the lower rung of the staff, and so they readily agreed to contribute to many of the activities. This partnering and sponsoring was a new development. For example, an industrial association in Suryapet agreed to sponsor 50,000 small waste bins to be distributed free of charge for promoting segregation, while in Eluru, an industrial enterprise called ITC agreed to buy mixed recyclable waste at Rs.4 per kg from the households, thereby saving the municipality the additional burden of the separate collection of recyclables and their subsequent sale to the dealers. They also trained self-help groups in secondary sorting of recyclables. This not only generated additional jobs for the poor, but also led to a better understanding of partnership with community groups in SWM activities. In the two towns nearly 145 people, mostly women, became involved in secondary sorting.

### **4.3 Training in monitoring and supervision**

One of the most important aspects of the second phase of training was concerned with the monitoring and supervision of work. This was something which had not previously been assigned to any sanitation inspectors. There were two very specific activities which needed close monitoring, (i) whether the door-to-door collection was taking place at the specified time and regularity, and (ii) whether segregation was being practised by the households. Beside these duties, the sanitation inspectors had their regular supervision tasks of recording the attendance of sweeping and sanitation staff, as well as awareness-building in the community.

### **4.4 Monthly review meetings**

A review meeting was conducted every month. The purpose of these meetings was to inform all the staff about the progress that had been made and about the constraints facing them. These meetings also helped to build a healthy competition among the senior staff to see whose ward or zone was cleaner than the others. It was also a time to review the complaints received from the public and to find ways to address them. Perhaps the most important part of the monthly review meetings was that they provided opportunities for learning from one another and for inviting suggestions on how to tackle difficult problems faced by any of the sanitation inspectors.

## **5. Lessons learned**

- When seeking to implement any law or initiative, it is important that all concerned staff are part of the planning process and informed about all relevant laws and regulations. Staff who are involved in day-to-day operations often have useful ideas on how to improve these operations.
- It is critical that the entire staff is given a general orientation regarding any new initiative and that they possess all necessary information regarding the project.
- If staff at all levels are informed about objectives, proposed activities and progress, and they are given clear roles and responsibilities, the resulting sense of ownership produces useful suggestions, motivation and commitment, which lead to improved and more economical services.
- The staff should be given specific directions concerning their responsibilities instead of simply giving general instructions on what has to be done.
- Training should be a continuous process and should not end after one or two workshops. Review meetings and new decisions made regarding a specific activity also provide opportunities for capacity development.