

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES OF THE INFORMAL WASTE COLLECTORS IN GALLE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL AREA

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INTRODUCTION

Increased in urban population and the change in the life style of people have exacerbated the demands for consumables and thus have paved the way to a larger generation of wastes in terms of volume as well as per capita. Solid waste generation is based on the economic development, density of population, size of the urban habitation and consumption rate of commercial goods (Glawe, *et al*, 2005). Therefore, demands for waste collection services and the frequency of waste collection are continuously becoming issues not only in urban areas but also in remote areas. At present, there is a huge deficiency in the provision of waste collection services delivered by local authorities and the situation is worsened by inadequate financial resources, poor technical skills and inefficient waste management practices in Asian countries including Sri Lanka (Zurbrugg, 2003).

In developing countries, informal waste collectors play an important role in solid waste collection. In fact, they provide clear economical and environmental benefits to the society, and their activities should be improved and supported (Sandhu, 2009).

Despite of their invaluable and significant contributions to the society, the informal waste collectors are isolated and totally ignored by the society. They are often marginalized by the rest of the society, and survive in a hostile physical and social environment (Medina, 2005). Their issues remained unattended, even when waste management strategies and policies are formulated.

Therefore this study attempts to investigate the social and economical issues faced by the informal waste collectors and to find remedial solutions to overcome those identified issues.

METHODOLOGY

Galle Municipal Council Area (MCA) was selected for this study as there were major issues related to waste generation and collection in Galle MCA irrespective of the involvement of many government and non government-organizations (NGOs) in waste disposal in this area. Purposive sample of 25 waste collectors who have been engaged in informal waste collection within the Galle MCA were selected for this study.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held to collect information from the waste collectors to discuss their economical and social issues in-depth. FGD is a method of data gathering in groups which explores a topic about which little is known, or little has been written in the past and is well suited to gather information from illiterate communities, where the selected sample belongs (Dawson & Manderson, 1993). After the FGDs, score and ranking method was used by the participants to prioritize the most crucial social and economical issues associated in their livelihood. The issues were listed by the researcher in a sheet and participants were requested to

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prioritize them based on their personal views giving “1” for the most important issue, “2” for the second and “3” for the third in order of priority and write the relevant number against their main issue in the sheet. Finally, problem analysis tool was used to identify the main root causes and effects of the issues already identified through the FGDs. This tool is also a commonly used tool to collect data from illiterate people.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Informal waste collectors in Galle MCA revealed that their job was affected by both economical and social issues. Issues identified by the waste collectors during the FGDs and the prioritized issues using score and ranking method are given in Table 1.

No	Issue	Score (1 = most important issue)	Total	Prioritized issue
1	Constant price fluctuations in the market	1, 1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1	10	1
2	Inadequate amount of money in hand	1,2,2,1,1,1,1,2,1	12	2
3	Total dependency on “ <i>Mudalalee</i> ”	1,1,2,1,3,1,2,2	13	3
4	Lack of social recognition	1,3,1,1,2,2,2,3	15	4
5	Lack of social identity	2,2,2,2,3,3,3	17	5
6	Difficulties in transportation	3,1,2,2,2,2,2,3,3,3,3	26	6
7	Inability of giving real prices for collecting material	2,3,3,3,2,2,3,3,3,3	27	7
8	Inability of getting reasonable price for the waste material from the middle scale waste collecting shop owners	1,3,3,2,2,2,3,3,3,3,2	30	8

Table 1: Prioritization of identified Issues

The most crucial issues were identified by calculating the scores given by all the participants. The lowest total score denotes the most crucial issue as the participants ranked 1 as the most critical issue. Accordingly, the economical issues were predominant than the social issues. The five most affected issues were constant price fluctuations in the market, inadequate amount of money in hand to collect waste items to their fullest capacity and total dependency on “*Mudalalee*” or waste dealers, lack of social recognition and identity.

Figure 1 illustrates the causes and effects of the major issue (constant price fluctuations) using problem analysis tool.

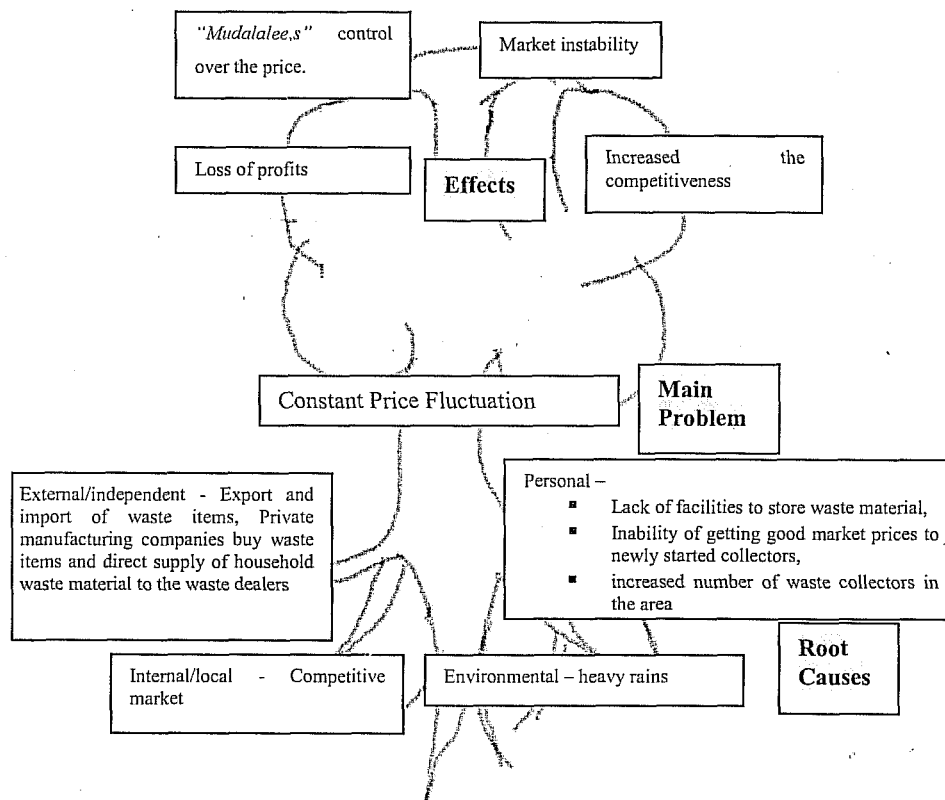


Figure 1: causes and effects of constant price fluctuations - problem tree analysis

The reasons for inadequate amount of money in hand to collect waste items were inadequate savings as the waste collection was the only income generation avenue, inability of collecting waste daily inability of savings due to their addicted habits such as smoking, drinking alcohol, gambling and increase in cost of living expenditure. However, waste collectors mentioned that their daily income range from Rs.500.00 – 1500.00 and stated that the amount was adequate to cover their daily expenses.

Root causes for total dependency on “Mudalalee” were that waste collectors were solely depends on the key money given by waste dealers or “Mudalalee”. The identified effects of the problem were inability of making profits for the informal waste collectors and the over control of “Mudalalee” as they were the sole authority of determining the selling price of waste items.

The major social issues were lack of social recognition and identity. Reasons for lack of social recognition were mistrust, negative perceptions and deep rooted attitudes about informal waste collectors. The effect of this issue was identified as the negative social image of informal waste collectors that persisted for a long time.

They claim the behaviour of their own fellow waste collectors as the reason for receiving low social identity.

As a result suspicion, negative attitudes and perceptions among the householders were generated and have a bad impact on genuine waste collectors.

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal waste collectors in Galle MCA were badly affected by both economical and social issues; economical issues in particular. This study revealed that informal waste collectors were economically affected by, constant price fluctuations in the market, inadequate amount of money in hand to collect waste items and total dependency on waste dealers or 'Mudalalees'. When investigating on social issues of the waste collectors, the study identified two major issues: inadequate social recognition and identity.

In order to address the above issues, the following remedial measures are recommended:

- Authority and power of waste dealers in controlling the market prizes should be restricted by re-organizing the waste collection chain and providing an alternative method.
- Informal waste collectors and informal waste collection service have to be more organized and networked in a manner that bring economical and social benefits to all the relevant stakeholders in the sector.
- The services rendered by the informal waste collectors should be socially recognized and appreciated by providing identity cards, uniforms, safety gears, micro credit facilities etc.

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