

**Can Mumbai's landfills be a thing of the past, NGO Praja asks**

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The Covid pandemic has once again pressed on the need to find an alternative to open landfills like the one in Deonar. (HT Photo)

Landfills have been the go-to answer for garbage disposal of cities in India. However, these can be source of diseases, cause frequent fires and overall an archaic way of disposal of solid waste. The pandemic has brought to forefront the importance of sanitation and hygiene as a key determinant of health. It is therefore an opportune time now, for the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to streamline its solid waste management (SWM) practices and change directions to look at alternatives.

**Current status of SWM in Mumbai**

In spite of a huge budget allocated to solid waste management over the years (₹2,906 crore in 2020-21), BMC has been lagging in the nation-wide rankings under Swachh Sarvekshan. Mumbai's 2019 rank was 49 among 100 cities (with more than 1 lakh population) fallen from 18 in 2018. The fall can be attributed to the change in methodology, which added weightage for certifications such as Star Rating. Under the Star Rating for Garbage Free Cities, Mumbai had a two-star rating in 2019, and in

response to its application for five-star rating for 2020, lost all its stars, after not meeting the criteria of 100% sweeping of public areas in the third-party survey.

In terms of meeting targets under the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2016 (MSW rules) as well, Mumbai has been lagging behind. While the MSW rules provide for 100% segregation of waste at source it is noticed that only 83% segregation was done in 2018-19 (includes waste not segregated at source). BMC claims that 100% door-to-door collection was done in 2018-19. However, data shows that in 2019, of 17,116 SWM complaints, 36% were related to garbage not being collected. Apart from that, waste recovery and timely solving of complaints also requires attention.

### **73% of solid waste is food biodegradable**

BMC's Environment Status Reports show that 73% of solid waste composition in Mumbai is food biodegradable waste. What is evident from a four-year trend is reduction in this food biodegradable waste through various policies that incentivise composting, have reduced the overall waste generation of the city from around 9400MTD in 2016-17 to 7450MTD in 2018-19.

For example, the policy of not collecting biodegradable waste from bulk generators (units generating more than 100kg per day) started in January 2018, saw almost half (49%) of such units compost their waste by March 2019.

BMC therefore needs to focus on further reducing biodegradable waste being collected and going to the landfill by incentivising and strictly implementing such measures for all waste generating units. BMC should set a 1-year target of reducing waste generation from around 7500MTD to 2000MTD by adopting a zero food biodegradable waste policy that mandates decentralised composting.

This will not only enable the city government to meet its MSW rules' target of 80% recovery of waste, but also increase the waste to compost tonnage under Swachh Bharat Mission.

First, it needs to involve people in the waste management process through a mix of awareness, incentives as well as punitive measures. The need for segregation of waste, not just into food waste and

dry non-biodegradable waste, but the latter into toxic waste, medical waste and recyclable waste is important, even more now with households generating medical waste due to the pandemic.

Second, it needs to set up the required infrastructure and networks within six months for enabling decentralised composting. Ward 189 in F/South, Mumbai is a successful example of decentralised composting within the ward, with door-to-door collection and segregation through community involvement. BMC can look to develop constituency-wise SWM plans spearheaded by the local elected representatives and prepared with public involvement taking into consideration the demography, land-use and other constituency specific issues.

Third, BMC should stop collecting food biodegradable waste from residential and commercial units in a phased manner from the eighth month, while promoting recovery of food waste.

Fourth, strict monitoring of its implementation and regular reviews of the performance of individual units, non-government partners and of the constituency plans.

What remains to be seen is whether BMC is able to implement radical changes in the coming years that send landfills the way of the tram – for people to remember of it as a thing of the past.

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Link- <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/can-mumbai-s-landfills-be-a-thing-of-the-past-ngo-praja-asks/story-TV29vn2GNCqw6Kg7XPiDHK.html>