

Panchayat shows the way in Waste Management

Author - Karthik Madhavan, Published on - 23.7.2014



Workers in Kurudampalayam

Panchayat engaged in preparing panchagavyam. Photo: M. Periasamy Coconut husks are used for preparing vermin compost

R. Renuka Devi, R. Dhanalakshmi and G. Rajesh rush with whatever containers they could place their hands on to the cattle that urinates. They collect the urine to take it to a storage container that is half full.

Mr. Rajesh says that he needs the urine to prepare 'panchagavyam', a popular concoction used as pest repellent, toilet cleaner and a few other products.

Even as he is explaining, Ms. Dhanalakshmi exchanges the container for two small, handy tiles to collect cow dung. That is stored in plastic drums and then taken to the nearby biogas generation plant at the Kurudampalayam Panchayat.

The local body, which is on the city's outskirts, is experimenting on a novel resource management system involving solid and liquid waste, says Tha. Murugan, Project Director, District Rural Development Agency, Coimbatore. The agency is helping the panchayat with financial and technical assistance.

The 17 cows and bulls the panchayat maintains are central to the system, 'Integrated and Sustainable Solid and Liquid Resource Management (SLRM) Project' in that the workers engaged in the process feed the cattle with the good organic waste collected from all the 13,000-odd households.

Not all the organic waste is fed to the cattle, though. It is only fresh vegetable and fruit waste and that too only after it is cleaned, says D. Ravi, the panchayat president, who actively supports the SLRM Project. The rotten, wet and decomposing waste is taken to a shed, where it is spread into beds, sprinkled with watered waste from the biogas plant and then left for 45 days to decay into manure. The manure is sold.

The dry organic waste is segregated from the wet organic waste right at the first stage and undergoes a very similar process before it turns manure, explains R. Santhamani, panchayat member, Ward 4, and head of the Vallari Self-Help Group that is engaged in the process.

Not a waste is missed. Coconut shells in the waste are collected and sold. The coconut husks are used for preparing vermin compost. Fruit peels of good quality are used for producing washing powder and peels of second quality are used for making toilet cleaners, Ms. Devi says.

Likewise, the workers segregate egg shells, which they clean, dry and then powder to be sold as manure for rose plants. The biogas that is generated is used in the kitchen for cooking food for the workers engaged in the SLRM Project and also to cook food, which will soon be sold through two canteens that are coming up in Kathirnaickenpalayam and Vadamarudai. Mr. Ravi says the panchayat is also planning to let on rent the kitchen.

As for the inorganic waste, the Vallarai SHG members and the people they employ segregate the waste into different categories to be sold to waste dealers. They, however, retain the plastic and glass bottles to reuse them to sell vermin-wash, egg shell powder, detergent powder, etc.

C. Srinivasan of Indian Green Service, an NGO, says the SLRM Project is in keeping with the latest waste management technique. One important aspect of the project is that the workers the SHG has employed collect waste twice a day in a gap of 12 hours so that the waste is fresh. He is helping the DRDA and the panchayat.

By levying a small fee on the residents for the project and by selling the inorganic resource, organic manure, various aforementioned products and the canteen, the SHG should be able to run it on a self-sustainable basis, he adds. At present, though, the DRDA is helping the panchayat and the SHG run the project as do two companies that donate money under their CSR activities.

It is important that the project is self-sustainable because the panchayat does not have the financial wherewithal to support the same, adds Mr. Ravi. In all this the residents, too, seem to be happy. The panchayat is clean and the residents are happy, says resident Valsa Babu.

First Published in

The Hindu