



NEWS LETTER

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Say "YES" to Education for Rag Picker's Children

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Rag pickers in India are one of the poorest and most marginalized groups. Though they belong to the most deprived sections of our society yet they form an important backbone of our waste management system. They are the secret environmentalist who performs a vital role for the city; they rifle the detritus of modern life, recycle anything of worth and carefully dispose the rest. Unfortunately, these waste collectors are discriminated against, regularly harassed and possess least economic and social rights.

It is observed that rag picking in India is largely undertaken by children as well aged between 5 – 14 years, who do not have any other skills, for supplementing their family income. Thus, by way of refuse collection, they contribute to household income or own survival. They work in highly filthy & unhygienic conditions for long hours so that our cities can be kept clean and hygienic. But it is very saddening that the rag pickers and their children are devoid of all basic human rights – right to consume healthy food; right to drink clean water; right to live in clean and healthy environment; right to access basic education etc.

Problems faced by Rag-pickers:

1. Smoking, consuming alcohol & drugs etc are widely prevalent among the children of rag pickers.

FACTS ON RAG PICKERS OF INDIA

- Many rag pickers start at the age of 4-5 years. In a recent study, in Patna and Raipur ~20% of total rag pickers were between of 5-14 years, and 40% of the total dump site waste pickers were children.
- Children as young as 5 work from morning to evening to collect enough trash for sustaining themselves
- Many rag pickers come from rural areas into urban cities for better living and are unable to find opportunities and end up collecting trash.
- Many rag pickers live on the street, are homeless and have no access to education and healthcare.
- Rag pickers mostly work barefoot in all weather, get exposed to chemicals and hazardous substances and often suffer from life threatening diseases as a result.

Child labour, and in particular, "child rag-picking" deprives the child of its life. It transcends the barriers of religion, gender, caste and type of family. However, education, structure of family and poverty of the total family do play an important role in the life of child rag-pickers. Rag-picking when undertaken as job, by the children, pushes them to the brink of anti-social behavior and illness.

2. Basic Education of children is hardly found in their list of priorities.
3. As they belong to the lowest socio-economic strata, they are also deprived of basic amenities of life.
4. Because of poor sanitation leading to unhygienic living environment, they are vulnerable to various illness and diseases.
5. Despite the availability of modern health facilities in the proximity, these facilities are neither accessible nor affordable to the rag-pickers. As a result many a times, they remain ill and many of them including children die of curable diseases. Hence, Health is another non-priority area for rag pickers households.

Education of Rag Picker's Children – Basic Need

a. Role of Government

The law to provide educational support to children of parents involved in doing unclean occupation existed in India since 1977. But, unfortunately rag picking was excluded from the list of all unclean occupations. Activists movement against it forced Ministry of Social Welfare (Government of India) to announce some scholarships to the rag picker's children at the beginning of twenty first century but it failed due to lack of understanding between central and state government about unclean occupations. Further, many other schemes/awards, such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan has been announced by government, but could not show a significant impact in enrolling the rag pickers children into the schools and detaching them from rag picking to improve their living standards. The main culprit of failure of all these scheme is the current inadequate educational policy and formal education systems in our country, which does not create any interest among their parents to send their children to school. In spite, earning of their children by rag picking is more lucrative to them. Even, the government schools do not show any interest to enroll these children in their school for many social issues like discrimination. Thus, some serious attention needs to be drawn by the government, in order to secure the future of millions young innocent children for whom education is the most important.

b. Role of non-government organizations/people

Other than government, it is also the responsibility of non-governmental organizations and citizens of this country to stand up and demand actions to educate these children. The time is now to take actions for the

betterment of these children; else many of them will continue to sacrifice their lives by working in most inhuman and suffocating environment of rag picking at the age when they should be actually studying and playing. We can't keep on blaming the system or delaying our actions. We need to take collective and responsive actions now to cater to the problem of educating rag pickers children in our country.

Role of IPCA in educating the rag picker's children

In Delhi, there are about 3 lacs (approximately) rag pickers and around 60,000 are under the age of 5-14 years. Although it is like a drop in an ocean but IPCA took an initiative with the support of India Development Service (IDS), USA for the education of children from its own associates. There are approximately 700 Rag-picker (mostly migrants from West Bengal, Assam, Eastern U.P, and Bihar) from Delhi NCR, working under the umbrella of IPCA in its various waste management projects since year 2005-06. Both adults and children are involved in rag picking activities. The life of rag-pickers is almost same – be it any part of India. They are deprived of all basic amenities of life including health and education.

Considering the importance of educating rag-pickers' children, IPCA came up with two Education Centre at Noida in 2012-13 (one at village Barola, Sector-49 and another one at Village Sarfabad, Sector-73) as a pilot project. Though, it was very tough to get regular attendance of children initially, but slowly it took pace and now children are willingly attending the centers where they are being taught the basic/elementary education. Their parents also understood the importance of education as they could see changes among themselves with respect to discipline and personal hygiene. One of the major achievements is that the rag-pickers have started sending their children on their own to schools daily.

The positive responses from parents and children motivated us to scale up from two education centre to three more centers. At present, total 5 primary education centers (at Bhowapur, Ghaziabad; at Indrapuram, Ghaziabad; and at Noida) for the children of rag pickers are running in Delhi NCR. Also, IPCA is organizing health camps on regular intervals at these centers where the doctors do physical check-up of children. Proper medicines are provided to them free of cost (if required).

The main goal of IPCA intervention is to ensure that the children attend school/centre regularly and they progress

successfully into the governmental education network. To achieve its goals, a constant focus is being given on quality education and holistic development of these children with the vision to break this chain of "being future rag pickers".

IPCA emphasizes to bring the behavioral changes and self-respect among the rag pickers' community for their sustainable livelihood through its rag pickers children education programme. The program does not claim to make professional like doctor / engineers but it will definitely bring moral and social values into the rag-pickers children and that's the only way we are looking to form a civilized society in which children will choose their profession as per their own wish.

The principal objectives to initiate the programme are:

- To develop moral and social responsibility among the rag-pickers' children
- To provide primary education through fun learning activities
- To aware rag pickers community about general health care and sanitation through primary education
- To improve lifestyle and social status of rag-pickers community and
- To stop any child to become rag-picker without his or her own wish

IPCA's Approach

IPCA achieved its goals through following approach:

Awareness: IPCA discuss with parents about the importance of education and contribution of educated children to the society and how they can perform better, if they get educated.

Development of special teaching materials/aids such as matching sets, counting strings, fractions sets, number concept dominos, word boards, picture boards are being developed to impart meaningful education.

Language and numeric Development Skills: Appropriate methodology has been adopted to improve reading-writing skill of children.

A multi-grade multi-level teaching methodology has been adopted due to the age of children varying from 3-14.

Art experiences are also given to children, where they express their feelings and understandings. **Physical and Games Activities:** Children are also taken to

nearby parks to develop civic sense, hygiene and cleanliness.

Activity based learning is imparted to the children and are encouraged to cut their nails habitually, take daily bath, comb hair and wash hands.

Health Check Up Camp: To ensure their health and nutrition status, regular health camps are organized at every school for checking up of their BMI, ENT, skin, nails, hairs and their anemic condition. Dental check up and systemic examination, including respiratory system, CVS, abdomen and nervous system are also performed to get the complete health status of every child. On diagnosis, appropriate treatment is given to the children with their complete follow-up after the camps.



Milestones achieved

- Total 267 children are enrolled till date under our primary education programme for rag pickers children out of which 54% (144) are girl children.
 - Total 65 students have been enrolled into the government school till date of which 55% (36) are girl students. The acceptance of the children into government schools has convinced other parents to enroll maximum of their children in our network schools.
 - Primary Education Programme of IPCA is resulting into better school readiness and helping to reduce the number of drop outs of these children from the government schools
- The little step of IPCA is contributing considerably towards 'BETI BACHAO BETI PADAO' movement of Government of India.



Challenges

- The structure of rag pickers communities and their lifestyle pose unique challenge for an educator. Because of their weak financial conditions and lack of knowledge regarding the importance of education, rag-pickers are reluctant in sending their children to education centers. According to them, sending children to schools is complete waste of time.
- Mode of communication is another huge barrier for the educators of the educational centres. Since most of the children are migrants from Bihar, West Bengal and Eastern Utter Pradesh, their mother tongue is Bengali, Bhojpuri or Maghi. Therefore it becomes a challenge for educators to teach them in Hindi. The efforts have been made to select the educators from their own communities to remove this barrier.
- The children are not regular to the schools many times as they have to help their parents or look after their siblings when parents are out for rag picking.
- Since the rag pickers do not have permanent place to stay and they keep shifting their locations from one place to another, there is irregularity in attendance of such children in schools.
- Last but not the least, lack of concrete financial support in running the programme is also a hindrance in maintain a formal education centre. Currently, the unit cost to educate a child is approximately Rs. 3250/- per child per year. The cost will get doubled or tripled in case IPCA plans to develop the proper school building. This seems

to be difficult to manage without any government financial support.

Way forwards

IPCA's vision is to increase the number of such primary education centers/schools by 40 at least (one in each godown working under IPCA) in rag pickers community in Delhi NCR in next couple of years and then to rest of the parts in India as an education mass-movement. It is though the difficult task but not impossible if tangible support from rag pickers' communities, government and other institutions will be provided. IPCA also wish to educate each girl child of this community and would like to contribute significantly to Government of India's **BETI BACHAO BATI PADAO** movement.

