Waste-recycling and the household economy: the case of the Pune waste-pickers response to the changing 'rules of the game'.

INTRODUCTION

> Globalization can also lead to new opportunities for those who work in the informal economy... However, a collaborative effort on the part of grassroots organizations of those who work in the informal economy with sympathetic representatives of non-governmental, research, government, private sector, and international development organizations is needed to enable the most vulnerable segments of society to seize these opportunities (Carr and Chen 2001) p.3)

Introduction

The question that this volume is addressing is whether the neo-liberal form of modernization is having an effect on the household informal economy; and whether it is market or other forces that result in a transformation in the informal and household economy. This chapter argues through a case study from the informal sector in Pune India, that it is not only neo-liberal change that globalization has brought about, but there is also a trend to global standards or community expectations which through various mechanisms, the state has to implement: in this case urban solid waste management.

The other key element that sets a context for the case study is the gender relations at the household level as a prime site of control in the informal economy (Harriss-White 2002), and in the Indian context though it is hard to talk of gender relations without looking at the interaction of class and caste, and in the case study looked at in this chapter caste in the context of waste management where 'Caste is the strongest trades union'(Harris-White 2005)p.10). The regulative role played by caste is complex in urban waste management, where caste structures both the creation and disposal of waste, without either of which many markets and the key elements household economy cannot function. Waste is linked to the domestic economy as rubbish marks the boundary between domestic and public space, and the disposal of waste is a highly gendered activity. The dirty, dangerous, and demeaning (3D) tasks in Indian society not only fall to lower castes, but to lower caste women: as a rule men tend not to handle household waste. '…[waste] disposal is part of a paradigm of service and subordination where caste and gender still reflect rank and stigma'(Harris-White 2005) (p.10).

This chapter will examine the case of the waste pickers of Pune who over a 20 year struggle have not only challenged the existing order of marginalisation and discrimination, but have been nimble enough to also seize the opportunities that some of the changes that neoliberal

driven modernisation has brought, enough even see changes in their household relations, brought about by the job security and prestige that legitimacy brings.

The Informal Economy, Gender, and Globalisation

The informal economy in India is an important site of economic production for the country as a whole and while estimates vary, it is generally agreed that is makes up the bulk of the economy, and according to the World Bank, employs 93 per cent of workers and produces 23 per cent of GDP. It is a dispersed and fragmented sector based around petty production and trade which makes up a little over half of all livelihoods (Schneider 2004)p.26) with services being the second largest of informal activities employing 20 per cent of the Indian workforce in 2004-05 (Naik 2009). Women are disproportionately represented in the informal sector, and needless to say their work is less secure than men (Lund and Srinivas 2000). For example, women make up 18 per cent of the informal workforce but only six per cent of the formal economy. This disparity is worsening as more women move into the informal economy as domestic workers, home-based workers, street vendors, and waste pickers, all of which make up the most volatile sectors at the bottom of the employment pyramid (Naik 2009; Chen and Raveendran 2012).

The shift to the informal sector is a global phenomenon in response to the globalised production processed. Most developing countries have experienced a substantial decline in formal wage employment and a concomitant rise in informal employment, which has implications for poverty and vulnerability: "…[the] globalization of the economy tends to reinforce the links between poverty, informality, and gender" (Carr and Chen 2001)p.3). While modernisation towards some elements of a neo-liberal economy in India has seen little change in much of the informal economy, there are pockets of sharp change which can be the proactive in changing existing gender and household relations.

Waste picking, even though a long standing caste-based informal activity, has become an important part of the growing informal economy, and is in interesting in how it has to adapt to the changes in regulation and work practices that aspects of globalisation have brought. While solid waste management has generally ignored waste pickers and the informal sector:

> …conventional approaches in solid waste management (SWM) usually lead to centralized capital intensive solutions that ignore the potential contributions of the informal recycling sector (Dias 2012)p.1).

This is despite the very high 50 per cent waste recycling rates that waste pickers can achieve (Wilson, Araba et al. 2009).

Gender and the Informal Sector

The gendered relations in the informal sector are very strong and related to the household economy in as much as informal sector work is effectively a family business with all the patriarchal relations one finds in these especially in India. Gidwani and Reddy talk of these gendered relations in the informal sector is as the '…banal violence and ironies of *fin de millennium* urbanism, a fiercely contested frontier of surplus value production' (Gidwani and Reddy 2011)p.1625), by which social structures such as caste and family patriarchy provide a *de facto* regulatory framework, and this framework is resistant or immune to change by means of government deregulation or changes to macro-economic policy (Harris-White 2005). This chapter challenges this view and presents a case that suggests a subtle break down of these stereotypes is possible under some aspects of modernisation, particularly where a change in regulations provides not only a possible threat to livelihoods, but also can provide an opportunity for social transformation in those livelihoods.

This case looks at an urban program in the city of Pune in Maharashtra, which started in the early 1990s, working with the local waste-picker community to support them to realize their rights. These programs for waste-picker rights are not new, for example see the case of ASMARE in the city of Belo Horizonte in Brazil, where similar conditions applied, who started a program to realise waste-picker rights, also in the early 1990s (Carrasco and Goodstadt 2009). Like ASMARE the Pune program took the radical step of not being led by outsiders (such as an NGO) but being led the waste-pickers themselves, but supported by NGOs in terms of providing some institutional capacity and limited funding. The Centre for Continuing Education of the Women's University (SNDT), took on the catalytic role of an NGO, but rather than being top-down, was akin to a service provider to the waste-pickers' own organisation Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) which is roughly translated from Marathi as 'the association of waste-pickers in the city'.

The other part of the case study is the nature of an NGO intervention. In this case the NGO eschewed the more common approach of improving women's livelihoods through microfinance, micro-enterprise development and the like. Rather it looked to negotiating and adapting the 'rules of the game' in local government to first secure the rights of the waste pickers, then for them to gain a seat at the broader city waste management table, and finally to secure what was their existing livelihood in a way which protected their rights, reduced their work load and enhanced their dignity. All of this was done with processes and strategies developed by the waste-pickers themselves.

The catalyst for final step the changes in the waste-picking work itself was brought about not by neoliberal market changes but rather by changes in solid waste management regulation through a court case based on Public Interest litigation (PIL) where in the middle class quest for a clean environment, that is no rubbish in the street, was the issue at hand (Rajamani 2007). This legal action resulted in the Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules 2000, which emphasized the need of recycling and doorstep collection of recyclables, but not the right to a livelihood of waste pickers in the recycling process (Chaturvedi and Gidwani 2009): this was something the waste pickers had to fight for themselves.

Waste-pickers

So who are waste-pickers? In the streets of any large city in India you will see small groups of women (and sometimes children) around and inside garbage skips, sifting through and collecting scraps of paper, tin, plastic, and cloth. These are also known as *rag pickers,* as traditionally they collected rags and bones, but this has broadened to include recyclable waste more generally, and so the more accurate name is waste-pickers. In India's pervasive caste system, waste-pickers sit fairly close to the bottom rung, being a sub-group of *dalits*, a name that in Marathi literally means 'suppressed' or 'crushed' — the most marginalized in society. The *dalits* were kept to the most menial and unpleasant tasks, such as cleaning up other people rubbish, and other such jobs that higher caste Hindus would not do due to their degrading nature, being seen as 'unclean' in the Hindu religious tradition, and it is the *dalit* women who take on these roles. This particular group of *dalits* were formerly agricultural labourers and came to Pune in 1972 from the rural areas of Maharashtra following a devastating drought; and in Pune they found that waste-picking was about the only work that *dalit* women could do, outside of the more poorly paid domestic service.

The program that SNDT developed had its genesis in 1990 when it started an informal education program for working children in the urban slums of Pune. It was here that that SNDT staff met child waste-pickers and accompanied them on 'their forays into garbage bins' and the lives they led (Chikaramane and Narayan 2005)p.1). The informal education program, had a much greater effect on SNDT than the women ostensibly being taught literacy and the like, and

Waste Recycling in India

Informal waste recycling in India with minor regional variations has been structured in a pyramid form with scrap collectors *ragpickers* at the base, generally being women and children who access garbage dumps (landfill sites) and the large and small bins in the streets. Women do the more menial waste-picking work as men will not do it but work in the 'upper' end of the waste recycling pyramid. The male scrap collectors who have push carts and buy scrap from small shops and businesses, and are also scrap collectors.

Thirty per cent of the women are widowed or deserted and over half are the major contributors to the household livelihood and less than 10 per cent are literate. They collect paper, plastic, metal, and glass scrap moving on foot 10-12 km per day with head loads as great as 40kg, and earn a little over a dollar a day. This scrap is sold to scrap dealers some of whom are registered, who are almost exclusively men who are in a position of power and frequently cheat the women through manipulating their scales or buying waste on credit and not paying on time.

it brought home to the SNDT staff the broader social justice and socio/political issues of slum life: key among these is the realisation that income generation programs did not reach the very poor, who have little time for additional income generation activities as they are already involved in very low paid, full-time, very arduous labour-intensive work. It also brought to the fore the gender and caste issues that go along with this type of work.

The main issue that the women waste-pickers had at the time was less about increasing their income levels, but more about changing the terms and conditions of their work as waste-pickers: a problem that waste-pickers have worldwide (Samson 2009). Waste pickers are regarded and living outside what might be determined as an acceptable norm by mainstream society, and while their role is an important one for the broader economy, they are socially ostracized and discriminated against by the authorities including the police.

SNDT realized that for a program to reach the very poor it had to target working people as workers, rather than as outsiders and social outcasts, and see waste-pickers in that light.

> …it was clear to us …that there could be other claimants to the 'wealth in waste' and small group endeavours were not likely to counter the threat and this became the basis for organising the waste-pickers on a mass scale (Chikaramane and Narayan 2005: 2).

The solution that SNDT and the waste-pickers came up with was to work with the waste-pickers as an organized group in mass actions around their rights as workers and citizens, rather than adopt the more common NGO approach of treating the issue of marginalization as an individual livelihood issue.

The main issues they faced, as mentioned above, were not only dealing with putrefying and dangerous garbage, but also issues of discrimination, including facing police round-ups when there was a theft in the neighbourhood, being cheated by the scrap traders they had to sell the scrap to, and the stigma associated with the occupation. The critical issue became one of establishing an alternative identity of waste-pickers as 'workers' rather than as 'scavengers', operating in what some saw as on the edge of the law in the informal economy (Post and Baud 2003).

As a result SNDT moved their attention to the right of waste-pickers as *waste-pickers*, and to establish the legitimacy and respect that should be associated with that role and identity. The second major shift was the realisation that a traditional approach of a development agency in setting up a 'project' with a predetermined timeframe, and a set out outputs and outcomes to address these complex issues would not work. As a result SNDT approached an INGO that had

an office in Pune for an on-going institutional support grant to work with waste-pickers, and one that had a relatively open-ended scope for the types of activities that would be undertaken. An open-ended funding relationship suited the program as the development approach adopted by SNDT became an iterative one where the implicit objectives and expected outcomes were continually changing as the waste-pickers progressed in having their rights realized and issues addressed.

The philosophical approach of SNDT in the program was from the outset, to first and foremost acknowledge waste-picking as a legitimate and worthwhile occupation, and that it should be supported as such, rather than having SNDT (or any other agency for that matter) seeking to provide programs aimed at alternative income generation. For SNDT and the waste-picker women it was important '…to establish an alternate identity for waste-pickers as 'workers' premised on the belief that scrap collection was socially relevant, economically productive and environmentally beneficial "work", and that working conditions could be changed' (Chikaramane and Narayan 2005: 3). The strategy then was to identify a process for formalising waste-picking as a legitimate occupation. The only viable way that SNDT and the women could see to do this was through a representative institutional structure, of which a trade union was the obvious model, given the inherent political nature of the struggle that waste-pickers were engaged in. Such a trade union, however, would be different from an industrial union as the waste-pickers were self-employed, and did not have a formal association as employees of the Pune City Municipal Corporation, which had overall responsibility for all waste management, including garbage collection.

The trade union model was preferred over a cooperative structure, as the struggle the women waste-pickers was primarily about their lack of recognition and dignity as both women and workers in often de-humanising conditions, rather than securing a share of an industry *per se*. But as we shall see later in this Chapter a separate cooperative structure did emerge, which led to them securing a share of the industry but this was many years later, and the union and its earlier work through the 1990s was a necessary prerequisite. A trade union structure inherently recognized waste-pickers as 'workers', and enabled them to adopt the methods of trade unions in negotiation, and the assertion of their rights. This included the strategic use of agitation methods such as rallies, demonstrations and sit-ins to demand change as being important and legitimate means, usually not open to, or at least avoided by NGOs. This was not only to achieve their immediate ends, but also to assert their dignity and solidarity as women waste-pickers. While waste-picking as we have seen is highly gendered with little opportunity for women to enter the higher end of the waste recycling pyramid, having their rights respected is a major step, and was empowering in itself (Kilby 2006).

A convention of waste-pickers was organized in 1993. Eight hundred waste-pickers attended from across the city, who one after the other recounted their stories of the indignity of their existence under a state of continual harassment from the police and others. This convention led to the formation of the Kagad Kach Patra Kashtakari Panchayat (KKPKP) as a trade union which established the waste-pickers as 'workers', and so provided a framework to form a communications link between the waste-pickers and the Municipal Corporation. KKPKP was formally registered later in 1993 with the 800 original members who attended the convention earlier that year. By late 2009 KKPKP had a membership of 8,000 waste-pickers, 90 per cent of whom were women, and around half were active in the union to varying degrees. It had a representative structure with an elected Council of 95 women and 5 men. This Council met every month to determine priorities and had, as a central tenet, the use of non-violent *satyagraha* resistance, to challenge systemic injustice to waste-pickers, their families, and their communities. KKPKP also has a governing board of 11 members (eight women and three men) of whom eight were scrap collectors, the President was the son of a waste-picker, and there were two non waste-picker activists associated with SNDT, also on the board.

The early years

The key issue that the waste-pickers faced in the mid-1990s was a lack of legitimacy, which in turn fed into a number of other hardships they faced in their day to day work. The lack of self-respect from their families, peers, and the community more generally, resulted in them seeing little future for themselves or their family outside of waste-picking, and so children were not sent to school but were often made to follow their mothers in their work of waste-picking, as well as other forms of child labour. This lack of self-respect and legitimacy led scrap dealers giving them low prices, and discrimination from the Municipal Corporation who saw waste-picking to be on the edge of the law, and so subjected waste-pickers to regular harassment and sometimes prosecution as vagrants and 'scavengers'.

The cycle of low self-esteem and lack of legitimacy had to be broken and that involved SNDT staff talking to the waste-pickers and sometimes working with them, at their work places, which gave the workers respect and legitimacy in the eyes of the women. The SNDT staff came to understand the issues waste-pickers faced and identified with them. From these cautious initial steps membership of KKPKP was slowly built in the city wards, and from there representatives were selected. By 1996 as the numbers and confidence in the union grew, the union representatives were being elected with from within each slum area and formal meetings were held every month to discuss issues important to the 100 strong council of waste-pickers and SNDT staff.

The other important principle adopted by SNDT was that the organisers who worked with the waste-pickers have a close understanding of these women and their work, and so as part of the 'induction' for staff, they spent some time with the waste-pickers at their workplace, and worked with them in picking out recyclable waste. There were four organisers originally employed for this role, with three activists in the role of broader management and strategic oversight. This meant that the organisational structure was small and able to avoid becoming too bureaucratic; and it also meant that a lot of the organisational work had to be done by the waste-pickers women themselves, thus instilling autonomy from an early stage of the organisation development. From SNDT's point of view, as an organisation it offered and promised nothing in a way of tangible benefits or services to the women, but rather sought to instil a belief that collective action could end individual isolation and injustice (Mander 2002). There has also been a certain amount of goodwill for the waste-pickers plight from the broader community who see their struggle as justified, and so the pejorative views of trade unions were avoided.

Identity Cards

One step towards obtaining legitimacy and avoiding harassment was to establish legitimacy through a recognized identity for waste-pickers, and one that clearly classified scrap collection as legitimate work. The issue of identity and respect is important in formal sector occupations as is the important notion of 'belonging'. One quote from a waste-picker was that after work they now changed their clothes and '…looked like everybody else' (Kilby 2011)(p.86). While *rag-pickers* were recognized, and more of often than not disparaged, as a caste identity; waste-picking as an occupation was not recognized in the same way. The solution that the union came up with was the idea of an identity card — the existing ration cards and the like established the women's identity as *dalits*, residents, and welfare recipients, but they did not establish their identity as waste-pickers and workers.

The union, through a series of demonstrations and public rallies from 1993, lobbied the Municipal Corporation to provide, or at least recognize, an identity card for waste-pickers. In 1995 the Pune Municipal Corporation became the first municipality in India to recognize and endorse the identity cards issued through KKPKP to *authorize* the waste-pickers to collect scrap, thus recognising their contribution to the 'work' of the Municipality's waste management processes. This wording of 'authorize' was important as it was much stronger terminology than 'allow'. It implied a right to the waste, rather than merely access to it under the grace and favour of the Municipal Corporation, and result of the introduction of the identity card was that the level of harassment of KKPKP members fell markedly.

The example of the identity cards is but one of the services the union brought to the women. In addition they had set up their own cooperative scrap wholesaling centre to provide a modicum of competition to the existing wholesale merchants; they had *inter alia* their own microfinance scheme, a health insurance scheme, and a scheme to support waste picker children's education. All of these support services from the union were important as they cemented the work of the union and its relevance to the day to day lives waste pickers, and also built its legitimacy in the broader community.

KKPKP Autonomy

In the early 2000s, after the union had been operating for around ten years, KKPKP began to look for ways to securing its independence from outside support by INGO donors and others. While it was appropriate to receive support for small one-off pilots or research activities, it was important that as a union KKPKP be self-funding for its institutional support. While union fees from such a marginalized group would never be enough to run the costs of a union, they were hoping they could build a corpus of funds that the income from it would be able to cover the costs. The breakthrough came when after years of sustained lobbying the union had waste-picking in Pune classed as an 'unclean' occupation by the government (Chikaramane and Narayan 2005), and therefore eligible for an education subsidy. The Maharashtra Government approved the waste-pickers through their Municipal endorsed identity card to be classed as being engaged in an unclean occupation and so be eligible for the Pre-matric Scholarship for Children, which was subsidized on a one-for-one basis by the central government to give a total grant of Rs5,000 (~US$100) per annum, per family (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment 2004). Until that time only the children of night soil carriers and similar workers were eligible. The campaign to broaden the classification to include waste-pickers was helped by a supportive media with headlines such as "Government finds rag-picking too clean to merit help" (Chikaramane and Narayan 2005: 15).

This subsidy, which was only available to KKPKP members, resulted in a rapid increase in union membership. As the union played an important part in negotiating the classification and subsequent subsidy payments, there was a strong argument from the union leadership that new members should pay 'arrears' membership to time the union was formed in the mid-1990s.

> They are benefiting because we struggled. For years without complaint we attended programs, protests, marches, meeting and conferences. We did not calculate in terms of immediate benefits. All those years [other] women laughed at us…. Today they befit because of our efforts. Let them pay for it. (waste picker women quoted in (Chikaramane and Narayan 2005): 29.

There were no complaints at having to pay the Rs 350 ($US7 in instalments) for the fees in 'arrears'. This set of fees then made up a corpus fund so that from 2002, KKPKP no longer needed institutional support from external donors, being self-funded from fees and interest income. This education subsidy continued for four years, but by 2009 payments had been suspended on the grounds of high costs if implemented across the State, and so the campaign for waste-picker justice continued.

Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH) Cooperative

The union had set up a basis for waste-picking to be a legitimate activity. The next very large step was in response to a change in the regulation following moves by India to be more globalised, and to some extent more corporate in its approach to solid waste management. Since the late 1990s has been a national move in India following a ruling from the Supreme Court to develop a national standard for Municipal Solid Waste Handling, with regulations coming into effect in 2000. Among other things, they directed municipalities to undertake measures for doorstep collection of waste, and its segregation in the household into various categories of recyclables — common in the West. The implication of this regulation was that the waste-pickers would be displaced if doorstep collection was privatized, something that occurred in the small city of Nasik in Maharashtra, where waste collection was done by private contractors, putting the local waste-pickers out of work. KKPKP also a similar experience when resident in some wealthy areas of Pune City hired private contractors to collect waste at the household doorstep, thus displacing 20 waste-pickers in one area. In another area, 300 waste-pickers negotiated for doorstep collection for 25,000 households, charging a nominal amount for the service, as well as the return from the waste collected (Mander 2002: 3640).

Given KKPKP's earlier experience, this regulation posed an opportunity as much as a threat for its members, provided that the waste-pickers could be integrated into doorstep collection. If this occurred they believed they would improve their working conditions, improve their earnings and 'transfer their status from scavenging to service provision' (Chikaramane and Narayan 2005). While the Pune Municipal Corporation was slow in implementing doorstep collection on a large-scale, due to resistance from both the municipal workers unions and the Municipal Corporation (albeit for different reasons), KKPKP saw the inevitability of the move and became proactive. They put to the Municipal Corporation that KKPKP would conduct a trial across seven wards of the city to see if doorstep collection by waste-pickers was feasible on a large scale. This trial commenced in 2005 and after eighteen months 1,500 waste-pickers were reaching 150,000 households, being 30 per cent of the city. Given this success the waste-pickers argued that they should be given the contract to cover the city (Express Newservice Nov 2,

2007). The trial did raise a number of issues, for example, the waste-picker women did not like being paid monthly; the households did not like to be paying for a service they thought they paid their rates paid for; and the Corporation also had reservations. But none of these problems were insurmountable, and in the end they were all resolved.

After some intense negotiations, further studies, and some backsliding by the Municipal Corporation (Times of India [Pune edition] 31Oct, 2007), an agreement was reached, and in August 2007, the Solid Waste Collection and Handling (SWaCH) Cooperative was established as the umbrella organisation for the waste-pickers involved in doorstep collection. Membership of the Cooperative was open to all, but the KKPKP waste-pickers were given first priority, and after them the next priority for membership were those classified as living in 'below poverty line' (BPL) categories. SWaCH was given responsibility for doorstep collection for 80 of the cities 140 wards, and a budget of Rs3.5crore (US$0.7m) to set up and run the program. The Municipal Corporation agreed to provide support for five years after which SWaCH was expected to be self-sufficient. The Governing Body of SWaCH comprises 14 waste-pickers/ collectors, two representatives of the PMC and one representative of KKPKP. Within a year of its establishment SWaCH was well accepted by the community, and it carefully positioned itself as proactive service provider offering a range of services to complement doorstep collection. They had their own website advertising these services (http://swachcoop.com/about-swachpune.html, accessed July 2009): including having drop-off points for householders to leave large items; building compost bins for householders; collecting electronic waste separately; and providing integrated services for institutions like schools, as well as office blocks and corporations. SWaCH looked at providing recycled products such as bags for sanitary pads only to improve the safety of waste-pickers, but also promoted the recycling message, and provided another source of income for the waste-pickers (Times of India [Pune edition] June 7, 2009). The waste-pickers were also been trained in 'soft skills' in customer service and communications, to improve their interaction with their clients: Pune's householders (Times of India [Pune edition] 12 April, 2009).

KKPKP was then able to connect to the global waste picking issues through its advocacy and policy work (Samson 2009). At the 2009 UN Climate Change Convention negotiations, KKPKP spoke out against the aspects of the UN's Clean Development Mechanism, and argued that the proposal to burn waste for methane production would make thousands of waste-pickers unemployed. The point that KKPKP made was that recycling saved 25 times more greenhouse gasses than incineration, and seven times more than landfill. They particularly objected to a Clean Development Fund (CDF) supported "refuse derived fuel" plant in the Pune landfill, which has reduced the local waste-picker earnings by more than half. "If the waste goes into the

incineration plant, what do we eat," Mr. Gaekwad said (*The Hindu* June 10, 2009). As seen from these case studies KKPKP is driven by the continued struggle for waste-picker rights, as well as raising awareness of the gendered and caste relations inherent in waste picking.

Gender and Waste-pickers

As indicated earlier in this chapter waste-picking was highly gendered. It was regarded as such an 'unclean' activity that men of any caste do not want to be engaged in it, and the *dalits* would prefer their women-folk to be engaged waste-picking at the household level, while men operated pushcarts from shop to shop picking up recyclable items. The big changes brought about by KKPKP, and especially SWaCH cooperative, was to essentially change the nature of the work so that it was less stigmatized, more lucrative, and involved fewer hours of work. The question that continued to face KKPKP, was how to maintain the access of their members to waste and not be pushed out by male dominated waste collection processes? The KKPKP was very careful to ensure that it not become a 'women's' union or be exclusive in any way, as they felt that while the argument for workers' rights had very strong gender dimensions, to make it exclusive would lead to divisions in the community, and enable opponents to adopt divide and rule tactics. The approach that KKPKP took was to ensure the representation in the KKPKP governance represented the proportion of men and women engaged in waste picking; and that these proportions are maintained as the new systems were implemented to avoid the phenomenon of men 'muscling in' on a sector as technology changes. With technological change it is often the benefits of the technology changes that is accessed by men at expense of women, and so the challenge for the KKPKP and the SWaCH cooperative was to ensure that did not happen.

The approach taken to protect the women workers, here was through strong membership structure through the union. While it was possible for the gender balance in the KKPKP to change over time to include more men, there were two important features that made this unlikely in the short-term: firstly, the requirement that all new members had to cover-off membership subscriptions back to when the union was formed, to limit the level of 'freeloading' that later membership brought; and secondly, the preference given to KKPKP members in doorstop solid waste collection for the city, through the rules that were put in place. The Pune Municipal Corporation could provide contracts to different providers, and as truck collection expanded with more automation would inevitably occur, but in the short to medium term this was unlikely due to the strength and relative militancy of the KKPKP. Over the twenty years of the program the children of waste-pickers were not taking up their mothers' occupation, and so in another generation it would seem that there would be fewer *dalit* women being involved in

manual waste-picking. The key change that occurred through KKPKP and SWACH was that the waste-picker women themselves had a strong influence on setting the pace of change.

The extent to which these changes have affected the patriarchal household economy is hard to assess, but the move from a semi-legitimate to a legitimate occupation is a very empowering step for women (Kilby 2006), and second the move from an informal activity to a formal one is another step to more equal household relations. As Kantor argues the work *per se* has little affect in household decision making, but when the work control is taken out of the household and the informal sector into more salaried or a higher status for the worker, then the greater the chance in their likelihood of the woman being involved in savings-related and other decisions (Kantor 2009).

Conclusion

The waste-picker program as a development program is an important case study of both success in meeting the broad goals originally envisaged, but also one of institutional sustainability, and challenging existing patriarchal relationship in the household and the informal sector. The program was initially supported by a relatively small annual grant from an INGO donor over ten years, and in that time the KKPKP was able build an investment fund from which staff are paid and secretarial costs covered, and to ensure the program was independent from donor funding. KKPKP has set up a separate cooperative to manage the work of waste picking itself, so that while the women still operated as individual traders, it was under the umbrella and protection of both a cooperative and a union, which provided powerful legitimacy for the work and the status of it.

Staff from SNDT were *de facto* seconded to the union and some of the staff of SWaCH are the children of waste-pickers. The women reported that they had their dignity restored: waste-picking was, and still is, seen as a dirty and low status occupation, but the KKKP provided it with legitimacy so that there was less overt discrimination from the middle class, they could stand up for themselves, and greater financial literacy with savings and banking. They were able to support their children's education, as they realized there were other options beyond waste-picking for the future generation, and there was also marriage support to prevent child marriage. Finally, they had a greater income with easier and greater access to waste, and they were formally recognized as part of the city's waste management processes.

SNDT had a strong commitment to its values and a strong program around the pursuit of the rights of the people it served, the waste-pickers. In terms of empowerment, the KKPKP had made a clear difference to the lives of the women, it had given them agency and enabled them to be able to negotiate with police and officials and make decisions around the work of the union,

which goes into the household. The outcomes of the work of both KKPKP and SWaCH was an effective increase in waste-picker incomes through access to waste, lower costs of credit, and more security in their employment. The waste picker program adopted a different model to most other NGO programs, with an emphasis more sharply focussed not only of the rights of the women but also their role in the process. They were actively involved in program priorities identification and design in a formal process through the monthly meetings. There was also a high level of staff accountability to the waste-picking women themselves. Being associated with the University (which largely leaves them alone) the staff were less involved in day to day NGO organisational issues and could focus their energies more directly on the waste-pickers, etc. It was a very successful model in what it set out to do.

The case shows that local communities can take advantage of some of the globalisation processes, which are modernizing economies like India. In this case environmental regulations around solid waste management to achieve broader social changes at the community level which over time can challenge gender norms at the household level. While these processes are slow and maybe fully realized over generations nevertheless there are opportunities for entrenched social structures at both household and community level to be challenged when the changes, not necessarily neo-liberal ones, that globalization provides opportunities for local level action.

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