

“My waste, My responsibility” A change in the paradigm of waste management How we did it!

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As time advances, so does human aspirations and so does the challenges such aspirations pose to save the planet. The recent advancements in human aspirations have been so complicated that this has become the basic reason for all of the problems that our planet faces today. It is said that, the resources that an average modern day person consumes today is equivalent to what ten thousand people consumed over 1000 years back. On top of it, our population has grown twenty times over thousand years, from around .3 billion to around 7.4 billion as of today. It is left to those who are good at Maths to calculate how much we are depleting our valuable resources today when compared to a thousand years back and how much damage we cause in terms of pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change in this minuscule fraction of a second.

Point of the matter is, life cannot continue like this. Only “Change” can tackle climate change and thereby protect our children.

- Initiative No 1: Green Protocol: A protocol for lifestyle change...
- Initiative No 2: Reuse – Swap Shop: *One man's trash is another man's treasure!*”
- Initiative No 3: Recycle
- Initiative no 4: Home composting

All our initiatives and innovations are based on the understanding that *sanitation and waste management has much larger connotations and ramifications with regards to consumerism, environmental pollution, Green House gas emissions and climate change and that what it requires is a holistic and long-term view with focus on lifestyle change, environmental and economic sustainability accomplished primarily by creating an environmentally awakened citizenry.* That view has now turned into a vision and the mission into a visionary.

A lifestyle change to save the environment has become a “moral imperative”.

- (Al gore).

Initiative No 1: Green Protocol: A protocol for lifestyle change...



Once the vision is crystal clear and environmental sustainability became the guiding star, there were only few options left. Many of them are laid down in textbooks and manuals, some of them never laid down anywhere in the world. But ultimately all of them became innovations. For example the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) is something every one’s heard of. But for the first time ever, each and every one of these textbook words broke free from print and sprinted with life through all our initiatives. The following is the list of such initiatives that the mission has been doing in the past few years.

Why and What is Green Protocol?

A deep analysis into the problem of Solid Waste Management will light the fact that waste becoming an unmanageable problem is a very recent phenomenon that began hardly ten to fifteen years back at the most. Increase in population as claimed by many is definitely not the main reason. If one analyses critically, it boils down to one word “**Disposables**”.

By disposables what is meant here is that the use of one time use and throw products has increased drastically in the past ten to fifteen years and with it the magnitude of the problem of its disposal. Disposable water bottles, disposable paper, Styrofoam and plastic cups, disposable paper, plastic and Styrofoam plates, disposable food packaging including aluminium and Styrofoam packaging, plastic bags, etc. **Therefore, Green protocol is essentially a set of measures which when implemented results in significant reduction of waste with primary focus on prevention of use of disposables and using reusable alternatives like glass/stainless/porcelain cutleries.**

When Green Protocol is implemented in any event, non-biodegradable waste generation becomes close to zero. Therefore, the question of waste management post the event becomes virtually non-existent. It was tried for the first time in National Games and now it has become a people's movement with many functions including weddings implementing Green Protocol.

Green protocol as of today has truly become a movement in Kerala. It has taken the form of an enviro-cultural revolution that the mission strongly believes is going to change the way we live in this Country and on this planet.

This initiative has been awarded the CM's award for best developmental intervention. MoUD has now directed the mission to spearhead this initiative in the upcoming FIFA world cup.

Innovativeness of the initiative:

- Though many initiatives have been taken in the sector of waste management, Green Protocol *is the first of its kind initiative, that gave life to the first R "Reduce" of the Solid Waste management hierarchy*, the importance and significance of which is felt all across the society and hence taken up people belonging to different religions and backgrounds.
- A disposable free event has never been thought of in the country before, and it was the *first ever National Games that implemented a Zero Waste concept* and this makes it the only mega sports event in the world that implemented Zero waste concept.
- Using events like that of sports, elections, etc to spread consciousness on environment protection and sustainable waste management behavior is another first.



Initiative No 2: Reuse – Swap Shop

One man's trash is another man's treasure!"



To reuse is to use an item again after it has been used. Many items that we might want to discard because we bought something new like clothes, books, children's' toys, shoes, electronic items like television sets, mixer grinder, etc could still be useful to someone else. Instead of throwing such articles away one could collect them in what is called “Swap shops” and give away to someone who might still want to use it. *Many such swap shops are being organized by the mission which is yet another innovation of the mission as this is another unique initiative in which the second R – Reuse is implemented in a practical and replicable manner.*

Initiative No 3: Recycle



It is not a well-known fact that India recycles almost 60% of its Non-biodegradable waste. The unsung environmentalists who make this unbelievable figure a fact, are none other than our friendly neighbourhood scrap dealer along with the rag pickers and the waste hawkers who effectively form one of the most vibrant informal recycling sector in the world. But for the amount of recycling, that these invisible environmentalists enable in our country, the highly chemical nature of the waste that we are dumping would have polluted our environment twice the amount it has polluted so far.

For the first time in the country a state level inventory of all those involved in informal recycling sector including scrap dealers and rag pickers (2000 in total) has been created and have been formally registered with the mission. Their contact details have been published in the website there by formally integrating them with the formal waste management schemes of the Local Self Government Institutions. This has given a fillip in the collection mechanism of recyclable making it a win-win situation for both the LSGIS as well as the informal recyclers. Encouraging them with ID Cards and Welfare benefits are in the pipeline.

There was a time in Kerala when almost all of the Centralised Biodegradable Waste management facilities started failing one by one everywhere. Waste became a source and cause of violence in the state, with people protesting everywhere against poor maintenance of the facilities and the resultant pollution and health hazards, these facilities were causing.

The main contention behind these protests was, why should the people of a Grama Panchayat bear the ill effects of waste coming from a city. The mission having been a visionary as always, understood that **waste from one person, cannot keep travelling to some one else's backyard**. It is against the principles of Natural Justice. So the mission devised a very unique strategy of Source Level Treatment of Biodegradable waste. Many types of devices were distributed to the household so that they could manage their kitchen waste on their own. **"My waste, My responsibility"** became the new slogan. This does not mean that government has no responsibility in sanitation. It only, essentially means the waste generator is primarily responsible for the waste s/he generates and therefore ensuring its proper disposal and moreover biodegradable waste being the non toxic portion of the MSW, it is being emphasized that people should manage it themselves.



Initiative no 4: Home composting

The main advantages of this initiative:

1. *Prevent a minimum of 2,50,000 tonnes per year from ending up in some one else's backyard*
2. *This has transformed the waste generator himself to waste picker and waste manager and It has prevented violence due to public protests, Prevented pollution due to dumping*
3. *Reduction in carbon footprint as so much waste need not be transported anywhere nor power huge waste management plants.*
4. *Ensured self sustainability as waste is treated at the same place where it is generated.*



All the above initiatives stand different in that it is for the first time the waste management hierarchy is given its practical implementation when the general tendency is to focus only on the last two rungs of the hierarchy.

This shift in responsibility back to the people and shift in the mindset from “I waste: You pick up” to “I waste: therefore I am responsible” , in the sector of waste management could be the first in the world with around 8 lakh households (almost 10% of the population) managing their waste within their premises. As can be seen, this is a very unique strategy attempted nowhere else in the world at a scale and success level, as has been done in Kerala by the mission.

- a) Added to this, our waste management initiatives are coupled with organic farming. People have been motivated to use the compost from the units that the mission provided and use it for kitchen gardening to become self sufficient in vegetables, that too pesticide free! This way the mission made a *perfect marriage between Domestic Composting Programs and Organic Farming through Kitchen Gardening which is yet another first in the country*. Thereby we are now progressing with a vision of making each local body especially urban local bodies, self sufficient in vegetables and other such essential crops. We are truly marching towards futuristic concepts of Urban Farming in real time... in today’s time

To conclude

The mission has understood that waste management cannot be just projects and investment. The real place that needs investment is people’s minds. But this investment is *about simplicity, self-sustainability and everyone becoming a change agent who will bring change in their own micro environment that will send ripples all around him. It is about becoming the change we wish to see in the world*. It is this investment that has now ignited an enviro - Cultural Revolution towards a healthy planet and helped us create some of the innovations.

Many more are being created and many more are being awakened.