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city anchor: PCMC's 'double-standards' force SWaCH to quit Pimpri-Chinchwad

SWaCH, an autonomous wastepicker cooperative, which has drawn praise for its role in keeping parts of Pimpri-Chinchwad clean, is on its way out of the town. Frustrated by PCMC's "double standards," SWaCH has decided to terminate the MoU that it had inked with the civic body.

A delegation of wastepickers of SWaCH, led by labour leader Dr Baba Adhav, met Municipal Commissioner Dr Shrikar Pardeshi on Monday and served a notice seeking termination of the MoU between SWaCH and PCMC.

SWaCH said its decision stemmed from unfair and dual system of waste collection being implemented by the PCMC in the city. It said they took care of Divisional Wards A and D while areas under Division Wards B and C were contracted out to BVG Kshitij India Limited.

Lakshmi Narayan, governing board member of SWaCH, said

the organisation that has been hired for other wards runs on weight-based waste collection model that has been denounced by several national and international 'Best Practice' documents as it goes against the principles of reduce, reuse and recycle.

SWaCH has been operating in PCMC since October 2010, with 263 wastepickers collecting waste from 2,43,000 households via 133 Tata Ace hoppers.

"Since the inception there has been many issues that have been brought to the notice of the administration on a regular basis. However, the PCMC has not bothered to address any of them. Moreover, in complete violation of the spirit of the original proposal, PCMC signed a five year contract with BVG in October 2011 for door-to-door collection of waste in the wards B and C without charging user fees. PCMC has been unfair by introducing a non-user fee-based and weight-based system in these wards of the city," said Narayan.

"The models of SWaCH and BVG cannot work together as citizens will not pay for a service that is being provided free in two other wards. The progressive increase in number of people paying user fees will not be possible any more," she

said.

SWaCH claimed that PCMC would benefit by tying up with them and will lose crores if they join hands with other agency. "In our model, PCMC will pay less while in other model, PCMC will have to dig a big hole in its pocket."

Pardeshi said SWaCH was apparently facing financial constraints as the users were refusing to pay. He said he is going through a copy of government resolution.

"After I study it thoroughly, I will take the decision. I will strictly go by the rule book," he said.

SWaCH claimed that its model of solid waste management is decentralised, environmental-friendly and user fee-based that upgrades livelihoods of wastepickers and promotes community participation besides putting accountability on service provider.

Dr Adhav disapproved that PCMC had served a notice to SWaCH during the period while negotiations were on, “It is not possible to try such innovations when a civic body is not committed to the principles or values of a cooperative and is keen on pursuing a contractor-based model,” Adhav said.

SWaCH said PCMC had approached it in 2009 to suggest a universal, user fee-based door-to-door waste collection model using hopper vehicles purchased with funds from JNNURM.