Chapter 10
Impact of Urban Policy Reform: A Case Study of the Informal Sector in Solid Waste Management in Delhi

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Introduction

The initiation of reforms by governments, in order to improve their functioning and overall development or progress, has been the hallmark of both developed and developing countries across the globe. During the 1980s, as a result of internal and external pressure, governments around the world brought about functional reforms[1] in order to make public-service delivery more efficient and more responsive to the needs of the citizens and to have greater accountability.[2] However, such developments left certain sections of the population out of the ambit of positive effects envisaged at the time of formulation of the reforms. It is difficult to determine the exact reason as to why certain state interventions or measures to improve the way of life for people have gone so tragically awry, as James Scott puts it.[3]

In order to determine the reasons for the inability of the state to disperse the benefits of reforms the present chapter takes up the case of reforms which were introduced in solid waste management (SWM) in the city of Delhi and the impact it had on ragpickers who form the informal sector in the management of such wastes.

Waste management has been given scant attention in the developing countries, being sidelined in comparison with other issues such as the provision of housing,

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[1] Reforms have been defined as "deliberate efforts on the part of the government to redress perceived errors in prior and existing policy and institutional arrangements" by Grindle and Thomas 1991, p. 4.

[2] Donald 2000, p. 1.

[3] Scott 1998, p. 4.

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electricity, water etc. In India it was with the Surat plague that the dismal state of SWM activities in urban centres was highlighted and its importance in urban governance. The Chap. 11 by Sacratees in this volume estimates welfare loss due to improper municipal solid waste management in Tirunelveli, which highlights its importance for urban governance acknowledged. Despite coming up with various measures and committees to improve the management of wastes, it was only in 1996 that by way of a PIL filed in the Supreme Court of India (Special Civil Application No.888 of 1996, Almitra H. Patel and Another vs. the Union of India and Others) that the Ministry of Environment and Forests notified Municipal Solid Waste (Management & Handling) Rules 2000 (MSW Rules) making it mandatory for all municipal bodies to follow the rules. However, the attempt to reform SWM by the MSW Rules proved to be far from satisfactory. This led municipal authorities to seek the help of the private sector to provide better services. Such an action led to the "municipal authority moving from being a service provider to being a regulator and service facilitator."[4] Such a step was adopted by many cities in India with Delhi being one of them. However, the amount of attention that has been paid in policy documents to the informal sector which is involved in the management of wastes has been very sparse. The informal sector which is involved in SWM comprises various levels. The sector is labour intensive and comprises a chain constituted by recyclists (ragpickers), recyclable dealers (small, medium and large) and finally the recycler units at the top. It has a hierarchical structure, with increasing specialisation and decreasing numbers as we move upwards. Ragpickers are the actors at the bottommost level in the informal sector engaged in SWM. They earn a livelihood out of collecting recyclable material from garbage which is generated from households, commercial establishments etc. and selling off the recyclable material to the junk dealer. Ragpickers form the focus of this study.

The incorporation of the ragpickers in the formal mechanism of waste management can fill four gaps in the waste management system. First, they can help in the door-to-door collection of waste. Second, they can contribute to the segregation of waste which is by and large ignored by the municipal authorities. Third, incorporating this section into the formal mechanism of waste management would lead to better collection of waste in congested cities than using sophisticated machinery and would allow for more areas to be covered as well. Fourth, the formal incorporation of ragpickers in SWM activities would also ensure that they get a proper livelihood and the conditions of their work can be improved as opposed to the risky environment that they presently work in, with no proper equipment which can jeopardise their health. Despite the contribution of ragpickers to SWM, Urvashi Dhamija notes that "public policy by and large has considered it impractical to incorporate this section in the official waste management system."[5]

It is this non-inclusionary nature of reforms in SWM which had a negative impact on the informal waste industry, more specifically on ragpickers leading to a dent in their source of livelihood that the present study tries to explore. With

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[4] Zhu et al. 2008, p. 73.

[5] Dhamija 2006, p. 72.

approximately 1,50,000–2,00,000 waste workers in Delhi, most of whom belong to vulnerable communities and are unable to find alternative livelihoods apart from the fact that they work in extremely hazardous conditions, it becomes imperative to explore such questions.[6]

The chapter at hand is divided into three sections. The *first* section illustrates the review of literature undertaken, wherein the concept of reforms and the various processes and the role of policymakers by which they come about, are explored. The section also deploys the concept of social exclusion to see how certain groups in the population are excluded by the reform process and how well inclusion can fare when it is used as an antidote for social exclusion as well as the various obstacles which prevent a democratic reform process. The *second* section dwells on the methodology used to empirically test the theoretical framework built by the review of literature. For this purpose, the case of SWM reforms introduced in Delhi has been taken up along with an assessment of the resultant impact of these reforms on ragpickers who constitute the informal sector involved in the management of wastes. The *third* section of this chapter presents the results of the study carried out by the researcher. The final section summarises all elements explored in the chapter, bringing forward the main obstacles which prevent policy reform from being inclusive and democratic in nature.

I

Review of Literature: Reforms, Reformers and the Logic of Development

The forces which drive reforms can be broadly classified into two: external and internal factors. The chief external factor which drives reforms would be "market-driven globalization, generally in the guise of international financial institutions that impose their perspectives on governments and act as purveyors of ideas about appropriate policies for development"[7] making inroads into the domestic policy-making arena by forging close ties with not only the reformers or policymakers but also the economic elite. The influence of globalization also has another dimension. The reformers are mostly urban-educated individuals and, due to the kind of training that they receive, are pushed to believe that the reforms are needed to keep up with the changes that governments across the globe are bringing about and that their own country must not be left out. As a consequence, they sometimes bring in reforms which are ill-suited to the needs of their own state reflecting their "strong

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[6] Schindler and SB 2012, p. 8.

[7] Grindle 2000, p. 5

belief in the superiority of the market"[8] which to a great extent is due to their "academic training"[9] and "professional experience".[10]

The internal or domestic factors which bring about reforms are varied. However, the main actors and institutions which play an important role would be pressure from certain groups or individuals in society, NGOs, mass media, small bodies within the executive and political pressure. Thus, by looking at the various factors which lead to the generation of reforms it can be concluded that reforms are "elite projects generated by small groups that shared similar concerns about problems of governance in their countries".[11] In this context Richard Bately argues that reforms are highly bureaucratic in nature, with negligent levels of public engagement, especially when it comes to the poor or "silent stakeholders".[12] These factors suggest that the reform processes do not, as is generally believed, emerge from the need to meet the demands of particular challenges, but are carefully calculated actions that may benefit a particular group or give political mileage.

When it comes to the formulation of reforms and their failure or success, policymakers occupy a significant position. One of the chief reasons cited for the inability of the policymakers to come up with policy change which incorporates the needs of all is their lack of "reflexive-self understanding of the community" that they are working for due to the "high-modernist"[13] manner in which they are trained, where only rationality becomes the basis for reforms, turning a blind eye to the social conditions present. Despite the negative role that has been associated with policymakers in the reform process there is also a literature which shows that policymakers are not always to be blamed when reforms go awry. Policymakers do not function in isolation as they have to work under pressures coming from the political realm as well as the social realm. Thus policymakers have to juggle between various interests to arrive at a reform which meets the demands of all. However, policymakers function within a "policy space"[14] which allows them the freedom to bring about significant changes through reforms, belying the general belief that policymakers work solely to fulfil the demands of the political elite. Again, the utilisation of this space depends "on the ability of the decision makers to utilize information that they have at hand".[15]

Another factor which makes the reform process a top down approach is the role of development which is seen to be the driving force behind reforms for policymakers. When the way in which development is perceived is skewed, it can have adverse consequences. For instance, when development is equated solely with numbers rather than assessing whether or not it is leading to the development of all in

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[8] Ibid., p. 4.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 7.

[12] Batley and Larbi 2004, p. 44.

[13] Goodin et al. 2005, p. 3.

[14] Grindle and Thomas 1991, p. 8.

[15] Ibid., p. 8.

society. One way of avoiding such pitfalls would be how Amartya Sen describes it, that is to link development with freedom. If a particular policy for development leads to enhancement of an individual's freedom then that policy can be seen as being of some use as "development can scarcely be seen merely in terms of enhancement of inanimate objects of convenience, such as rise in the gross national product (GNP) or in personal incomes, or in industrialization or technological advance or social modernization. These are of course valuable—often crucially important—accomplishments, but their value must depend on the effect on the lives and freedoms of the people involved".[16] Therefore, the state needs to have a more nuanced understanding of the concept of development in the name of which it tries to bring in reforms. The propensity of the state to continually ignore the kind of problems certain people face when it comes to development can be better understood when there is a careful examination of the perspective of the state and the kind of relationship that the state has with such sections of the population. In other words, the concept of social exclusion needs to be examined to understand how and why some people are excluded from the purview of the state and what the obstacles to inclusive policy reforms are.

Arjan de Haan states that social exclusion is a *process* and that "social exclusion goes beyond the mere description of deprivation and focuses attention on social relations, the processes and institutions that underlie which are part and parcel of deprivation".[17]

As a consequence of social exclusion at the political, economic and group level, individuals and communities can also be excluded when it comes to policy-making or the concurrent reforms in the existing policies. Exclusion could be stark, that is when a group is completely excluded from a reform, or it can be more subtle, wherein groups or individuals may be adversely affected due to their non-consideration when it comes to policymaking. The reasons which can be accorded for exclusion of a group from policymaking are firstly, lack of thought about a group in society due to their social standing which determines the intensity of efforts which would be made for their upliftment. So a group which is looked upon with disdain due to its economic status, ethnicity, caste or nature of work, and is seen as a blot which society can do without, receives less attention not only from formal governmental agencies but also from society at large. As Evelin Hust puts it "whether the voice of the poor is actually heard or not depends also very much on how they are perceived".[18] Secondly, due to the nature of identity and the kind of work performed by a section can also lead to their exclusion from policymaking. For example the nature of the work done by ragpickers which is generally viewed as being dirty, filthy and illegal and ragpickers themselves being seen as dirty, due to their low caste, can affect the amount of space that policymakers give to them. As Barbarra Harris White points out, the work done by ragpickers due to the informality involved in the profession

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[16] Sen 2000, p. 506.

[17] Haan 1999, p. 1.

[18] Hust and Mann 2005, p. 10.

makes it "either below all tax thresholds or concerns untaxed products";[19] hence the activity is not recognised by the state. Thirdly, various factors prevent their speaking out making it difficult for the marginalised to make themselves heard and thus leads to a non-consideration of their interests when it comes to policymaking and the concurrent reform process.

To remedy this situation, the state does come up with policy solutions which are more inclusive in nature. However, inclusive action fails when policy disregards the social and cultural factors of the social group that they are working for. This is signalled by James Scott when he talks of "*metis*", that is the local knowledge which is imperative to take into consideration as it helps to better understand the issue at hand and also helps to ensure that the reform is long lasting. So there is a need for policy to be guided by the cultural factors "that may seem commonsensical to the intended beneficiaries but are often exotic, irrelevant or irrational from the perspective of the policy maker."[20] Doing so would ensure that policy reform which comes about is better suited to the needs of the various groups in society rather than being based on what the policymaker envisions as being the appropriate solution.

The rise of a vibrant and assertive middle class as a part of economic liberalization in the 1990s also impacted the inclusive policy process wherein there was a significant tilt towards this section of the society and a "growing amnesia"[21] towards the poor and vulnerable sections in society. In an attempt to naturalise these processes of exclusion a middle class-based definition of citizenship[22] emerged, which led to the "politics of spatial purification",[23] aimed at cleansing public places from sections which seem to come in the way of or do not fit in with the plans of modernization. Also the ability of the middle classes to establish themselves as legitimate citizens or as Partha Chatterjee calls them "proper citizens"[24] further pushed the urban poor to the margins "precisely because their habitation and livelihood were so often premised on a violation of the law",[25] hence driving policymakers to bring in more reforms to cater to the needs of the middle classes, thereby seriously impinging on inclusive policymaking.

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[19] Harris 2003, p. 4.

[20] Schindlmayr et al. 2005, p. 8.

[21] Fernandez 2004, p. 2416

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Chatterjee 2004, p. 131.

[25] Ibid.

II

Methodology: Solid Waste Management (SWM) in Delhi

This part of the chapter links the arguments made in the previous sections exploring the level of development of the informal section associated with SWM, more specifically ragpickers. In order to empirically test and determine further challenges for sustainable urban development for the exclusionary nature of policy reform which leaves the most marginalised sections of the population in a lurch due to the drive of the state to bring in measures for development for efficiency, the researcher examined the reforms brought about in the management of waste by the city of Delhi in the wake of Municipal Solid Waste (Management & Handling) Rules 2000 (MSW Rules) which made it mandatory for all municipal bodies to bring about better management of waste. However, the rules provide no space to involve the informal sector which is involved in waste management, more specifically the ragpickers, which jeopardizes their livelihood. Thus, the main objective of this study is to analyse how the measures to reform SWM in Delhi have impacted the lives of ragpickers who are a part of the informal chain involved in SWM, and in particular to determine whether they have been negatively or positively impacted and the causes for this outcome.

Delhi, like many other cities in India, in the wake of Municipal Solid Waste (Management & Handling) Rules 2000 (MSW Rules) which made it mandatory for all municipal bodies to bring about better management of waste, brought about a slew of measures to meet the targets, the latest being collaborations with private companies via public private partnerships to bring in better waste management. However, the rules provided no space to involve the informal sector which is involved in waste management or more specifically the ragpickers, thereby jeopardizing their livelihood. Thus, the main objective of this study is to analyse how the measures to reform SWM in Delhi impacted the lives of ragpickers who are the part of the informal chain involved in SWM, and in particular determine whether they have been negatively or positively impacted and the causes for this outcome.

Delhi's governance is carried out by three local bodies: the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC) and the Delhi Cantonment Board. Of the three, the MCD is one of the largest municipal bodies in the world, which provides civic services to more than the estimated population of 11,007,835 million citizens in the capital city. Recently, the MCD was trifurcated into three civic bodies which are: North Delhi Municipal Corporation, South Delhi Municipal Corporation and East Delhi Municipal Corporation.[26]

The researcher carried out the study in the erstwhile MCD zones which had used public private partnerships as a means to improve waste management. The study was divided into two phases wherein in the first phase the researcher examined secondary data in the form of official documents on the urban situation in India,

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[26] http://www.newstrackindia.com/topics/relevant/MCD.html.

with regard to SWM and ragpickers and specifically Delhi, drawing upon newspaper reports and articles in magazines to get a better understanding of how inclusive the SWM paradigm has been in the past and present vis-a-vis ragpickers. Doing a secondary data study helped the researcher to better understand the various laws and measures taken with regard to SWM in India and the amount of attention that had been given to ragpickers before and after the reforms were introduced in SWM. This also helped in triangulation and verification of the primary data which were collected in the second phase via personal interviews conducted with different actors associated in the process of waste management, to assess the impact of reforms in SWM on ragpickers.

The study used qualitative methods, mainly personal interviews, to gather information from the various actors, using semi-structured questionnaires with both open and close ended questions. The study began by conducting key informant interviews with five NGOs (Vatavaran, Toxics Link, Chintan, ACORD and Waste 2 Wealth), a union of waste recyclers (All India Kabadi Mazdoor Mahasangh, formerly known as Harit Recyclers Association), officials in the Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organisation (CPHEEO) under the Ministry of Urban Development, officials from the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, two private players involved in waste management and finally 40 ragpickers.

The objective of the interviews was to determine the basic demographic profile of ragpickers, the nature of the work that they perform, the income that they earn from the profession, their relationship with the urban authorities and urban residents, the provisions that the government has made for them, the demands that they have and the response/non-response to these demands as well as the reasons for the same. The interviews helped the researcher to determine the attention that has been paid (or not) by the government agencies to this section of the population in Delhi, and hence determine if the aim of sustainable development has been achieved, or in other words how inclusive reforms in SWM in Delhi have been. Non-availability of a proper governmental data on ragpickers proved to be a limitation to the study and the researcher had to depend on approximate numbers provided during the interviews. Another limitation was locating ragpickers as they are not confined to any one place in particular, making it difficult for the researcher to find ragpickers in the initial days of the survey.

III

Results: Problems and Prospects for Effective SWM

Refusal to Grant Formal Recognition

During the field visits, the researcher, by way of personal observation and formal and informal discussions with the various actors, found that the segregation of

wastes, a crucial step in SWM, was performed by ragpickers and not by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). For this they had to pay to get access; hence, revealing that despite not recognising the work done by ragpickers, the labour of ragpickers is being utilised by the MCD. Such a practice was also confirmed by NGOs who worked with ragpickers. On being asked if ragpickers were employed by the MCD waste workers to segregate waste, the response of all NGOs was in the positive. On being further questioned on the reasons as to why the contribution of ragpickers to the segregation of wastes was not acknowledged by the municipal authorities they stated that this is due to fear of disruption of status quo amongst the employees of the state who do not wish to part with the multiple benefits that they are now enjoying (i.e. they are being paid by the state, paid by the ragpickers to have access to waste, and have enough time to do moonlighting and be paid for that as well). The private companies do not highlight the fact that they utilise ragpickers because they do not want to show that it is a lucrative job.

Lack of Coordination

During the study another pattern which could be observed was the lack of coordination between the various agencies which were involved in SWM which could be one of the reasons why ragpickers have not been involved in the formal process of SWM. The interview with the MoUD revealed that even though ragpickers have not been mentioned in the MSW Rules, their role has been recognised in the Manual on MSWM which was to act as a guidebook for the municipal authorities. The MSW rules are to be enforced according to the needs of a particular municipality. However, this has not been the case in Delhi where there has only been an attempt to adhere to the Rules and no reference has been made to the Manual which gives enough "space" to the municipalities to involve ragpickers in the formal system of SWM. Moreover, due to the pressure put by NGOs working for ragpickers, an effort has been made by the MoUD to send directions to all state authorities asking them to make sure that their municipalities take measures to incorporate rag in the process of SWM. However, when the MCD in Delhi was questioned as to whether they had received any such circular, there was denial and it was also stated that the MCD has no policy for ragpickers so it cannot take any initiatives for this section without any orders from the centre. Two possible implications of this are: first, there is a communication gap between the central authorities and the urban local bodies; second, there is a certain laxity among the MCD officials to take relevant action for ragpickers. The relevant plans are being formulated for ragpickers at the centre but there is a total lack of implementation of these plans.

The Shortcoming of a One-Size-Fits-All Policy

It was also observed that at times, as is well known, reforms are informed purely by their success in another country, without always understanding their ramifications

or applicability in another area. This is evidenced in the case study carried out by the researcher in Delhi, in which measures to reform SWM in Delhi were overly guided by the desire to find technical solutions. For example, the move to bring in more waste to energy plants as a way to dispose of garbage may work in developed countries where waste has a high calorific value, but this is not the case in India. The move was made without any consultations with the various stakeholders who would be affected by such a move. Since participation by the ragpickers is not possible, the various NGOs which had been working in this field were also not consulted, showing that the government was looking for a quick solution to the problem of waste in the city, especially in the backdrop of the Commonwealth Games that the city was to host very shortly.

The study also shows that the expectation that ragpickers would be eventually incorporated into the practices of private waste management companies has also been belied, as the two waste companies who were interviewed were not keen to recognize the contribution of the ragpickers. Lack of commitment on the part of municipal agencies to pressure private companies to include ragpickers into their fold, and just resorting to advising the private companies to do so, lessens the chance of ragpickers to be involved in the work of private companies handling waste in Delhi.

Mismanagement of Solid Wastes

There is a reason to believe that wastes are still being mismanaged. This can be ascertained from an incident of radiation suffered by scrap dealers in Mayapuri in Delhi due to contact with a radioactive material called cobalt-60 while dealing with waste.[27] The incident once again puts a question mark on the state of SWM in the city. It can however be concluded that the issue of better management of waste has been now given considerable attention but the issue of ragpickers is still largely neglected. When asked if SWM activities in the city had improved at the cost of ragpickers the response was in the positive from the interviews conducted with the NGOs, ragpickers and the MCD officials. Ragpickers in the city have continued to work in a hazardous environment with all those interviewed stating that they handled garbage with bare hands, with no effort from the MCD to improve their condition. Of the 40 ragpickers interviewed, 24 said that they had a hostile relationship with the MCD and described how they have to bribe the MCD officials to carry on their work and also to ensure that they are not evicted from their make-shift homes. The precarious relationship between the MCD and the ragpickers in the city could also be seen in the response of the MCD official that the department had never tried to contact the ragpickers. Although the effect of privatisation of SWM on ragpickers does not seem negative when ragpickers were interviewed, as they still have access to waste, the response of the private companies to the issue of ragpickers does not seem promising. While one company does involve ragpickers in its activities to

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[27] For further information refer to the work of Payal Saxena, "Radiating Error," *The Week,* June 12, 2010.

segregate waste, it is on a purely temporary basis with no measure to make them permanent employees. The other company does not involve ragpickers at all in its activities and even stated that it has plans to innovate technology by which waste could be segregated without using any manual labour. The response of the private companies shows that if the possibility of employing ragpickers in their activities is very minimal at present, it would be even bleaker in future. Thus the reforms brought about in SWM have only translated into sparse improvement in the management of waste and have not been able to bring about a change in the lives of the ragpickers as they are not included.

Sociocultural Dimensions of SWM

Another finding which came out was that urban residents have a complex relationship with ragpickers. One of the explanations for such a situation is due to the attitude of people towards waste; it is mostly guided by notions of culture. Waste is seen as something to be discarded and not an issue which requires much attention. This leads to apathy when it comes to waste and the people who are dealing with it. This point is discussed by Emma Maldawsky who writes about "the debate between the domestic space and 'the outside'".[28] It is this apathy which is also reflected in the intense efforts by urban residents to demand better waste management without any attention being paid to people such as the ragpickers who form an important part of the waste hierarchy. This also points towards a growing tendency of "bourgeois environmentalism"[29] which encourages the urban residents to take up issues but only those issues which are seen as being "appropriate". Ragpickers do not fall in the category of people who could be described as "proper" citizens, which makes taking up their cause not so attractive. It is this "bourgeois environmentalism where middle and upper classes push their concern with visual beauty, entertainment, cleanliness and safety in an organised way to shape a metropolitan space of their own vision, while the urban poor are unable to articulate their own agenda for the city."[30] Thus, reforms in SWM in Delhi are "myopic in nature"[31] as the "policies fail to recognise SWM as a livelihood issue".[32] Since the work done by ragpickers leads to "no visible benefit in economic, environmental and sociological terms and the value generation is low as opposed to private companies, where the results are measurable, ragpickers do not seem to be a viable option to invest in; hence no move to have policies for them or a move to incorporate them into the formal process of SWM."[33]

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[28] Mawdsley 2004, p. 89.

[29] Gill 2010, p. 191.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Interview with Ms. Malati Gadgil of Chintan on 5th April, 2010.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

The study revealed that there have been no concrete efforts on the part of the local authorities to integrate ragpickers in the formal sector of SWM with zero contact with ragpickers. The same goes for private companies who are not so accessible to ragpickers in terms of employment. Despite the fact that ragpickers have space in the Manual on Municipal Solid Waste Management wherein it has been advised that they be incorporated into the formal waste management sector, no concrete steps have been taken by the municipalities on this accord.

IV

Conclusion: Towards a Non-Exclusionary Approach to Reforms

It can be concluded from the study that there is a need to take more concrete steps "to capitalize on the effectiveness of the informal sector and institutionalizing its participation in waste management"[34] instead of gearing towards measures which have not been able to bring about any positive change in the management of wastes. Including ragpickers in the formal sector in the management of wastes can have twin advantages of firstly, "improving the working conditions of waste workers by providing them access to protective equipment, healthcare and a pension scheme; and secondly, by ensuring that Delhi's high recycling rates are maintained".[35] Therefore, it can be concluded that when reforms are solely informed by the "high modernist" agenda wherein reform is only equated with "visible" outcomes, it can have negative effects. It can also be concluded that reforms in policymaking are successful when they are informed by the context and have proper accountability measures as well as a social system which takes into consideration the needs of even the most marginalised in society. It is only then that true democracy can be achieved.

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[34] Schindler and SB 2012, p. 19.

[35] Ibid.

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