

Chapter G-3

Views of officials and elected representatives

Based on investigations conducted
by R S Chavan and R R Pal

In proposing modifications to existing systems, it is very important to know the opinions and attitudes of both officials and elected representatives, so that the programme of recommendations can be designed according to what is feasible and achievable, and so that the presentation of the programme can be in a way that is most persuasive and appropriate to the views of the decision-makers.

This brief chapter presents the findings of a small exercise that was concerned with finding out the views of senior figures in Mumbai. Information was collected by personal interviews; this is a time-consuming process because it can be difficult to get appointments with such people, and a considerable amount of time is spent travelling. Little time was available for this survey, so the samples are very small. The results should not be taken as representative of the views of all officials and elected representatives, but simply as the opinions of a small group of individuals.

The following people were interviewed:

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
Additional Municipal Commissioner	The Honourable Mayor of the Corporation
Deputy Chief Engineer (SWM)	Opposition leaders of the Corporation
Ward Officers	Elected representatives of the Corporation

The questions asked, the answers and the investigators' comments are shown below. Numbers in brackets refer to the number of people answering in the way indicated.

1. What priority do you give to solid waste management in Mumbai?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
Second position [3]	First priority [4]

Comment: Although it is the tendency of political figures to always state that the current topic of discussion is their top priority, it is nevertheless interesting that both groups rated solid waste management so highly.

2. To what extent are you satisfied with the present system of collection, transport and disposal?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
90% satisfied [3]	90% satisfied [4]
	The public expects more [2]

Comment: It would be difficult for municipal officials to be critical of the system for which they are responsible. It would be interesting to know precisely what, in their opinions, the shortcomings were.

3. Do you feel it is necessary to introduce modernised systems of collection and transportation?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
Yes [3]	Yes, but in stages, without retrenchment of labour [4]

Comment: It is hard to imagine officials answering "No" to this question because to most people modern = good. However the opposition to retrenchment of labour (that is, a reduction in the workforce) is an important qualification to the answer, because nearly all modern systems have as their objective the reduction in labour, in order to reduce costs and make the work less unpleasant. So the answer from the elected representatives must be seen as "Yes, but no". Bitter experiences of strikes and the opposition of the labour unions makes the reduction in the labour force an issue to be avoided.

4. How do you protect your sanitation workers? Do you have any welfare scheme for them?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
Yes [3]	Yes, there is a housing scheme in which housing is allocated on the basis of seniority. [4]

5. What is the effect of slum dwellers on solid waste management?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
They are a nuisance [5] They are indisciplined [3] They should be removed from the areas they have occupied and their huts should be demolished [1]	They are a nuisance [4] They could be disciplined by education [4] The 2.5 FSI scheme * will improve their living conditions

Note: *The 2.5 FSI [Floor Space Index] scheme is designed to attract builders to create housing for slum dwellers. Land is given at no charge to private builders and housing societies on the condition that part of the building they construct is made available for slum dwellers.

Comment: It is important to note the difference in attitude between the two groups. The municipal officials are most aware of the difficulties caused by the slum dwellers, whilst the elected officials see the slums as a "vote bank" with considerable power in municipal elections. The municipal officials were perhaps thinking of the Rs 4.5 crores that they were spending each year on cleaning solid waste out of nullahs [drains] in the slum areas.

6. How do you feel about the participation of the public and their awareness of environmental issues?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
There is no participation or awareness; the public lack civic sense and will never improve [3]	It is possible to develop participation and awareness by education at primary school level and by frequent appeals in the media. [4]

Comment: The municipal officials seemed very discouraged by the attitude of the public, whereas the elected officials were somewhat optimistic. There is no doubt that campaigns to raise the awareness of the public need time and money, inspiration and perspiration.

7. What is your opinion on the introduction of privatisation in solid waste management?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
Privatisation has already been partially introduced. Privatisation would be welcomed if introduced in stages. [3]	Privatisation has already been introduced in transportation of waste. Privatisation is welcomed, provided that it does not cause labour retrenchment. [4]

Note: Contractors were providing trucks and drivers to collect a significant proportion of the solid waste from Mumbai, and virtually all of the drain wastes and construction debris. (There are more details in Chapter B-6.) They were being operated with labourers of the MCGM according to the norms agreed with the unions (usually six labourers per vehicle and one trip per shift.) The operation of these trucks was reported in the previous book (*Observations of solid waste management in Bombay 1992*), in which it was seen that collection by these contractors' trucks was more expensive than the collection service provided by municipal vehicles.

Comment: The condition demanded by the elected representatives - no reduction in the work force - has a great impact. In general the private sector is more economical because it can operate with smaller workforces and at lower wage levels. A prohibition on retrenchment effectively kills the option of reducing the costs of the service by privatisation. It appears that there is not even the option in Mumbai for reducing the workforce by natural wastage (that is, by not replacing workers when they retire) since there is an agreement that guarantees a job to a relative if a worker retires for health reasons before he is due for normal retirement, and this arrangement is used to maintain the size of the workforce.

8. How is your relationship with the Union?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
Cordial relations are maintained by always listening to their requirements [3]	Listening to them and discussing their needs keeps the relationship cordial

Comment: It appears that this is a very sensitive issue, and that care is taken to maintain a good relationship with the labour unions.

9. What do you feel is the role of rag-pickers in solid waste management?

Municipal officials	Elected representatives
They are a source of nuisance and undisciplined [3]	They are a source of nuisance but it is possible to keep them under control if they are brought under an NGO or a social organisation [4]

Comment: Some of the MCGM officials appeared to have a more positive attitude towards rag-pickers, as evidenced by an arrangement that was made that certain rag-pickers should maintain the area around the container where they were working in a clean condition, in return for the right to take recyclable materials from that container. The general hostility towards rag-pickers was no doubt caused by the habit of many rag-pickers to pull waste out of containers and leave it scattered over the ground after they had finished sorting through it.

Any manager of solid waste services knows that it is important to understand the thinking and objectives of the elected representatives. This short survey has touched on some of the issues, and suggested some of the conflicts and problems that municipal officials live with.