

## HOW YOU CAN PARTICIPATE



We would like you to be partners in this change, and invite you to be associated with us, no matter where you are located, and how little time you may have:

### You can participate by:

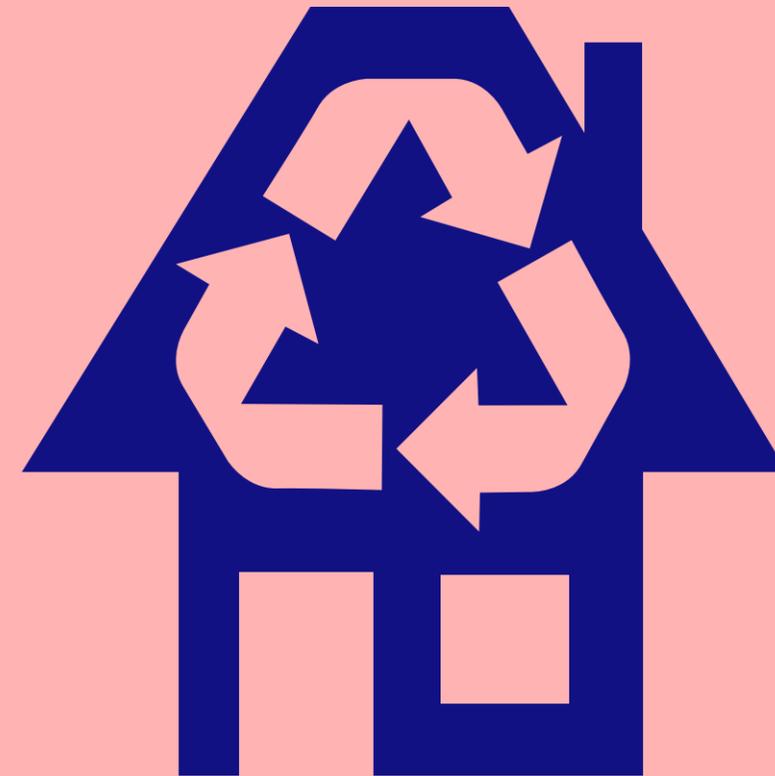
- **Volunteering** your time and skills in our office and on the field, even on the net.
- **Donating** old paper and other recyclable waste to help a child break the wastepicking cycle
- **Encouraging** your entire community or workplace to do the same
- **Inviting** us to your office to undertake waste audits that reduce costs and pollution
- **Sponsoring** a child's time to study
- **Spreading** the message of children's right to a clean environment and healthy futures
- **Undertaking** initiatives in your locality to minimize waste and toxics
- **Helping** raise funds for our work

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## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES



**CHINTAN**  
 Environmental Research  
 and Action Group

**Annual Report 2005-06**



**We are a registered, non-profit organization working on the issue of sustainable, equitable consumption and environmental justice.**

### **Our mission is**

to work towards social and environmental justice as well as a dignified existence for wastepicker communities, particularly of women and children, to help them move towards better education and livelihood opportunities.

To advocate for sustainable consumption and safer toxics free materials as a means to safe and environmentally sustainable products which do not affect the health of any as also of the wastepicker communities or impact the common environment of all.

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## INTRODUCTION

**This last year** has been overflowing with challenges. It is clear that cities across the world, and of course, in India, are changing fundamentally, and often, cruelly. The urban space is not a collective idea, but a drawing board where only a few make blue prints. Increasingly, the poor have been silenced, as structures of governance do not allow for their participation in the core debates – land use, services delivery and operationalizing livelihoods. Many of them have been demonized for several contemporary urban ills. They are viewed as the undesirable underbelly of a city.

Perhaps this is not new for many of you. However what is really new is an additional trend of an increasingly larger number of people, many of them not poor, being alienated from participating in fundamental decisions about the use/misuse of urban space. Natural eco-systems and natural heritage, for example, are being treated as plots of underused land. Toxic products and materials are being seen as symbols of an enhanced lifestyles. Meanwhile, mediums such as protests, dialogue, and stunning data have all been used to demand effective policy shifts.



Enmeshed in non-transparent decision making, a skewed process of information sharing and being accorded a low priority, public policy that includes and respects the poor has become even more elusive. But of course, there is good news, even in a tough year. The present report tells you the story of how Chintan has sought opportunities for the poor-men, women and children- from the emerging urban scenario.



The idea of opportunity is as we defined it over five years ago, along with our partners from the waste recycling sector. Since then, we have constantly refined it, as our own vision has been sharpened. In brief, we see opportunity as ***a means of living with dignity and safety and participating in society and in creating our own futures and present.***

As you read this report, you will find five different stories about creating dignified, sustainable opportunities in the context of sharpening urban conflict

The first is about seeking opportunities to be recognized: *Emerging from Stone*

The second is related to understanding the shape of a city, its governance and how it works and mostly, learning how to get it to work for you: *Chiseling Chance*

The third is to open doors through collective vision: *Carving Out Opportunities*

The fourth is to be able it to see environmental quality mirrored in our bodies and act upon it : *Preventing The Poison Within*

The fifth is to skill people to recognize themselves as environmental change-makers and act on the issues that concern them: *I am the Problem, I am the Solution*

**Bharati Chaturvedi**

*Director*



## EMERGING FROM STONE

**Policy typically embraces** only the visible. All the rest are slowly pushed into deeper invisibility, as if these invisible elements don't matter. If you hope to live in any Indian urban space, then, you must ensure you have a voice and a high recall value. If you are concerned about an issue, you must help it morph from being a concept ballooned with statistics and graphs, to a blood and flesh creature that lives amongst with us. Succeeding in this is crossing the invisibility barrier.

This year, Chintan has progressed further down this long bridge, both in our work with waste recyclers and in highlighting our concerns with environmental health.

In both cases, the strategy has been to work as a network, linking with diverse organizations and networks with whom we share a vision.

### Won't Hide in the Trash

This year, waste recyclers have been vociferously advocating for well defined policies for their work. This was done

through an ongoing policy advocacy initiative that seeks to lay out a policy for the sector. The rationale behind this is that such a policy will actually ease many of the problems faced by the sector. As we have seen previously, many of these problems are on account of the illegality of the sector and the lack of any formal spaces allocated to them. Instead of attempting to address the issues piecemeal, it is strategically sounder to advocate for a holistic policy that can absorb some of these problems.

There is also another aspect of this initiative; the available windows of opportunity. Already, the Delhi government has shown willingness to begin looking at a long term approach towards this sector, based on intensive interactions with Chintan. Similarly, police officials are actively considering setting up a joint committee with Chintan to facilitate improved interaction between the police and this sector. Besides this, a year and a half long campaign has also resulted in the partial inclusion of some aspects of

this sector in Delhi's Masterplan, made once in 20 years, albeit with gaps. The same campaign resulted in the inclusion of some significant rights of the sector in the Draft National Environment Plan of the Ministry of Forests and Environment. This makes it clear that there is an opportunity for change that can be fruitfully and innovatively deployed. It may also not come again.

The perceived need to link up with the sector beyond Delhi is because it is important to help other groups simultaneously understand the issues and advocate for policy change in their regions. Moreover, as more and more state governments are looking for solutions for waste handling, this recycling sector stands to be marginalized without strong advocacy for it. It is also seen that a policy change, or even potential policy change in one geographical area can impact another one to make similar policy changes, thereby multiplying the effect. Besides this, it is also important to build the capacity of stakeholders and the sector beyond just a single city, so that they are also able to understand and advocate for changes in policy.

Although there has been considerable discussion about the waste recycling sector and its inherent utility and services to the city, there has never been a policy laid out for it. Rather, the sector is covered by various prevailing rules, such as those related to hawking, plying commercial vehicles on the road during no-entry hours, etc. Many of these are highly unsuitable

for them and cause them extreme inconvenience. However, while piecemeal solutions are offered to individual problems on a case by case basis, there is no overall policy for this sector.

To actualize these ideas, Chintan has undertaken an advocacy campaign for recyclers. The broad contours of our plan are to produce a policy document, create a network of interested organizations and individuals as well as the informal sector and its representatives to work as a broad team.



Our work till now has focused on privatization of waste handling, advocating for a more inclusive law on municipal waste and bringing out a newsletter, *Jahan-e-kabari*. Chintan has been one of the several founding members of SWACHH, a network of organizations working with waste pickers, created last year. This year, we have linked up with many more organizations, many of which do not work exclusively on waste pickers, to seek

changes collectively. As always, the informal recycling sector has been included in diverse ways, because the campaign is finally by them and based on their vision for themselves. However, advocacy and policy issues require to be understood differently. As a result, we have held a number of workshops for the sector to help them understand how policy works and how some groups are able to bend it to their advantage.

A total of 15 workshops were held in different parts of Delhi.



We have also been able to collectively create an **informal international network** along with several other organizations working on issues similar to ours. Consequently, we are now networked with organizations in Egypt, Romania, Peru, Uruguay, Argentina, Cambodia, the Philippines and have already begun to understand the many innovative strategies from them already.

### Social Implications of Solid Waste Management: The Experience of Organizing Waste Recyclers in Achieving Select MDGs

Chintan has consciously been looking at its work through the prism of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). A paper on a specific aspect of our work, related to MGG 2, was presented at an international conference of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WASH) in Calcutta, from February 3rd to 6th 2006. The paper was divided into three sections. In the first, our work with children waste pickers was briefly outlined. In the second, the process of how Chintan has created partnerships with waste pickers to take up diverse waste handling contracts was described. In the third section, strands were woven from both the earlier sections to discuss how waste management, in this case, an imaginative approach to waste, has resulted in moving towards the Millennium Development Goal no 2, Access to Education (for Children Waste pickers). The final conclusion suggested that if such changes were to be replicated, then a shift in the way waste is perceived was critical.

### Jahan-e- Kabadi: The World of the Waste Recyclers

Chintan has taken the initiative of bringing out a bi monthly newsletter, *Jahan-e-Kabari*, for sharing ideas and news on the informal recycling sector and issues that impact them. *Jahan-e-Kabari* literally means the world of waste recyclers in Urdu. The newsletter will knit ideas together to share with both the sector and the larger world of practitioners and interested persons and organizations. The first issue examines the issue of privatization of waste services in Delhi and the shifting space of the informal recycling sector. It also points to the experiences of Egypt and Argentina.

### Poverty Alleviation Strategies by the Poor

A shot in the arm here has been Chintan's association with the UNDP's Urban Poverty Alleviation Programme, which began in September 2005 for a period of 18 months. The central objective of the programme has been to create pilot projects that contain clear policy implications that can be picked up for wider multiplier effects. Although the initiative divided up the NGO partners and the city into geographical locations and themes, it was still possible to showcase innovative approaches towards urban poverty. Hence, Chintan found itself

### Responding to Privatization

Delhi is slowly privatizing waste handling. Already, the more affluent zones of the Indian Capital have privatized waste collection and transportation. A part of this contract includes bin management. Bins are the large open spaces, where neighborhoods dump un-segregated waste. From here, waste pickers forage for recyclables that will earn them a living. With privatization, bin management has come to mean controlling waste and fencing common urban resources, per se. This management technique is reinforced by the contract signed between the contractors and the Municipality, which gives the right over the recyclables to the private vendor. In all this, the waste recyclers—most notably the waste pickers and small junk dealers—lose access to the very resources that they depend upon for a livelihood. Chintan chose to negotiate with the private vendors and come to a formal arrangement with them such that waste recyclers can actually access the recyclables while providing the additional services required in this new framework. We are still in the process of negotiating with one of the largest companies so that a win-win system can be worked out in this changing urban landscape.

allocated the area of Nandnagri, and was included in the project under the theme of Solid Waste Management.

Chintan's visualization of the programme was simple. We believe that if we are to work on waste, we must work in partnership with the most marginalized sector in waste handling-the waste pickers. Our strategy therefore centered around them. The central idea was to find opportunities for (and with) them that enhanced their employment, health and security, because poverty is significantly impacted by unequal access of opportunities. We also began working with the junk dealers of the area, trying to help them gain greater legitimacy. This, we reasoned, would reduce the harassment they experienced, invest in safer work for their employees and encourage small entrepreneurship that creates improved employment opportunities. Simultaneously, both waste pickers and junk dealers require intensive training to understand a range of issues, from their legal rights to learning to work as a group and federate, if they are to learn to utilize the chances in front of them. Another aspect of the work was to help find ways by which solid waste management would be a win-win situation for everyone. Chintan has used the idea of a pilot project to draw out effective policy making. The activities till now have been:

- Identifying an initial group of waste pickers and recyclers and holding discussions about our work.
- Building groups and helping them to shift from working as individuals to teams that support each other and build a collective identity
- A linkage between the police and waste pickers was created, to decrease the

harassment levels and foster improved working conditions

- Discussions with the UP Police were also initiated, as many waste pickers strayed into UP and were roughed up. A system of identity cards was devised in each of these cases, and is still being finalized. A total of 60 waste pickers were included in this in the first phase, still ongoing.
- A networking system between waste pickers already a part of Chintan and new ones was built, so that learnings could be leapfrogged.
- A joint wall paper, Kabarnama, was brought out to help forge a distinct identity as part of the organizing process. Two issues were produced, and it slated to become a bi-monthly.



- A survey of waste and its characterization was undertaken. This made it clear that there was little to earn by way of dry waste.
- Door to door collection of waste in legal settlements was begun, with waste pickers learning to offer these services. As of now, almost 2000 households are being covered under this system. These links helped clean up waste and improve public health while providing less hazardous employment to waste pickers.
- A waste recycling station is expected to be a critical aspect of the work. This will help accumulate waste so that it may be

sold at better prices. Besides, it allows for waste pickers to learn to work as entrepreneurs playing the waste market to a collective advantage. Permissions for using these have been sought and the file is still circulating

- A public hearing was organized with Sanjha Manch in the area on March 3rd 2006
- A study, currently being undertaken, will point out the potential of multiplier effect of such work.

It is expected that the perspectives gleaned from these projects will flow in policy-making and positively impact the urban poor.

This could also help to create a cohesive move towards fresh ways to look at poverty and its redressal, perhaps a fresh way to address an old concern?

### Public Hearing

About 200 recyclers from 12 parts of Delhi and 15 developmental organizations attended a public hearing in Nandnagri, East Delhi, on March 3rd 2006. The special invitees were from government agencies and other organizations. Twenty persons deposed with their stories. The central demands were placed: legal recognition of the work of waste pickers and junk dealers. Flowing from this was the second demand: the need for space to carry out this work. This was the first time many of the recyclers had ever seen how formal public hearings take place. Hence, the main outcome was not as much advocacy as preparing grass roots groups for future advocacy.

### Kabarnama

Kabarnama (or the Chronicle of Trash) is a wall paper brought out by the informal sector and Chintan, for the informal sector. It's focus is on stories and experiences that the informal sector might want to share. Contributions to the issues include poems, drawings, photographs, stories and reports.

It's current editorial board comprises both waste recyclers and a Chintan team member who helps produce it. Kabarnama was conceptualized as a strategy to build up a collective identity as well as strengthening a network amongst recyclers in 2002. Unfortunately, a lack of funds stopped us from producing it regularly. On pressing demands from the recyclers, this component was added to our strategy and funds raised for it.

### Marching to be Heard

Along with this, waste recyclers stepped out on the streets, participating in and organizing marches and events that brought their core issues out to the public as well as within some government offices. Participation has always been voluntary, but many of those who want to be there are unable to make it on account of distances. Chintan helps provide transport, but it is always inadequate. As the oil price rise, we can hardly expect to see greater participation, particularly from people who live far away. Still, their limited presence carries enormous value for the entire group.

- On 6th of October, 2005, over 300 waste recyclers joined a larger coalition, called the Sanjha Manch, to ask for the accountability from the Delhi Development Authority. The issue was simple: inclusion of the needs of the urban poor in the Master Plan 2021. After several hours of protest, the DDA agreed to a presentation by Sanjha Manch on its perspectives. This was made on 27th October 2005. No action was taken by the DDA although, significantly, they did heed the advice of many others who saw the city as an opportunity for developing real estate.



- May 1st is traditionally celebrated as Labour Day. In Chintan, we use the occasion, when work is slowing down on account of the heat, to celebrate the contribution of the waste pickers to the city. In 2005, 1st May, the waste pickers in the R.K. Puram area, (which lies in the heart of the city), organized a celebration where they took stock of the city and the waste recycler. About 1500 waste recyclers attended the meet. Other guests included well known persons from the development sector and media persons who participated in their personal capacity.

- Just a few days later, on May 5th 2005, over 150 persons from New and East Delhi participated in a national rally in Delhi, demanding that the Parliament pass the Draft Unorganized Sector Workers (Right, Regulations of Employment, Conditions of

Work, Social Security and Welfare) Bill, pending for several years. If this bill were to be passed, waste pickers at least would be able to access social security and to some degree, find their work formally recognized in government policy.

- In July 2005, the newspapers reported that the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) was to shut down the sprawling, highly popular second hand book market in Old Delhi. Apparently, it was seen as a useless, unproductive activity that blocked pavements. Many small junk dealers were outraged, as they had sold books to dealers here for years. Moreover, the market was held only on Sundays, when the entire area was closed. The biggest concern of all was the manner in which the city authorities framed such informal services and prune any sense of enterprise here. The organic growth of the city, informal institutions that many other capitals would welcome and promote, was being foolishly uprooted. On the 11th of July 2005, finally, a protest was staged by the Harit Recycling Association (HRA) and Chintan. Many other organizations and individuals supported this to the hilt and about 167 people gathered in all. Finally, the MCD withdrew its order. As in all other cases, it is still critical to monitor the issue constantly.

- This unexpected decision forced the junk dealers to think of how precarious their work was without a formal license. After many debates, they approached Chintan to help them organize a meeting with the Chief Minister to present her with a charter. When this did not materialize, they tried to march up to the Delhi Secretariat, the seat of power of the Delhi government. The police stopped them as they did not have permission. Finally, on August 25th, 2005, they were able to meet the advisor the Chief Minister and have since been following their case.

- From December 15th to 28th, 2005, well-respected artist Vivan Sundaram put up an art exhibition with the participation of Chintan at the Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi. The exhibition viewed the city through its waste, its detritus and those who cleaned it up, anonymously. It comprised a video work, which had Chintan members and waste picker Marian Husain perform. Marian also helped in creating several other objects, with the help of other artists working on the project. Large photographs of waste, some of it procured from Chintan, comprised a second section. Later, during the show itself, members of HRA put up a small, operational kabari (junk) shop. The show also included several discussions about the city of Delhi.

- March 8th is Women's Day. Although Chintan has hesitated in celebrating 'days,' we changed our minds this year. Given the increasing number of women who are becoming a part of Chintan, and who have been asserting their identity both as waste recyclers and as women bearing the additional burden of home in a hostile society, a celebration was held on this day in Seemapuri, organized in collaboration with the local groups there. Waste picking women from different parts of Delhi were brought here in small numbers and the event comprised songs and experience sharing amongst the women. In all, 80 women were able to attend the event.

- On March 21st, about 450 recyclers joined a larger demonstration by Sanjha Manch to protest against the demolition of their homes. If you live in a shanty or slum, you only live there because it's your best option, not because you want to live in such poor conditions. Most often, the poor live in sub-standard housing because its close to their place of work. Demolition results in large scale destruction of lives, work, futures, as recent history has now proved. When the government began the demolitions, it was

met with protests. The march was one of them. The waste recyclers could see the link between loss of a poor quality home and being forced to become homeless, because waste picking is so arduous, it forces a person to live near their beat of work.

- The **Harit Recyclers Association**, (HRA) is a registered body of small waste dealers and itinerant buyers who are part of the informal waste recycling sector. It is the first of its kind in India. It has been set up and organized as a joint partnership between the junk dealers and Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group.

The HRA organised its second annual conference at the JJ colony Road, Khadar Extension, in South Delhi, on 26th March, 2006. The annual meet was divided into two parts. The first was related to discussing the work and path forward of the HRA and the second was a discussion on "*Privatisation of Waste Economy and the Challenges Ahead*".

Around 350 junk dealers from different parts of the city participated in the conference, with organisations like Chintan, Hazard Centre, Toxics Links, Nirmana Majdoor Panchayat Sangthan, Sanjha Manch, extending their support.

HRA members at the conference demanded changes in the government policies and laws, for formal recognition of their work. This included giving the small waste collectors licence to operate and space to carry out their trade – segregate waste, store and sell it. They demanded dignity of work and stopping of harassment by the police officials. A new executive member committee was formed from amongst the junk dealers, which called for further mobilization and expansion of its membership base.

Other speakers discussed how they could extend support to create opportunities within the current privatization regime for the junk dealers. A police official also discussed how working conditions should be improved.



## CHISELING CHANCE

**You need to know** the world you live in. To survive and even flourish, you need to be able to get under the skin of your city, your town, your street. As always, a critical part of our work was to help waste recyclers build up their understanding of the city.

As part of this, we initiated several training sessions that were held throughout the year. The strength of these trainings lies in the fact that they are created and tested by the Chintan Team on largely illiterate people and based upon their needs. A toolkit for waste recyclers, combining all of these, is being prepared as a guide for trainers working with recyclers and comparable sectors.

### Leadership, Actually

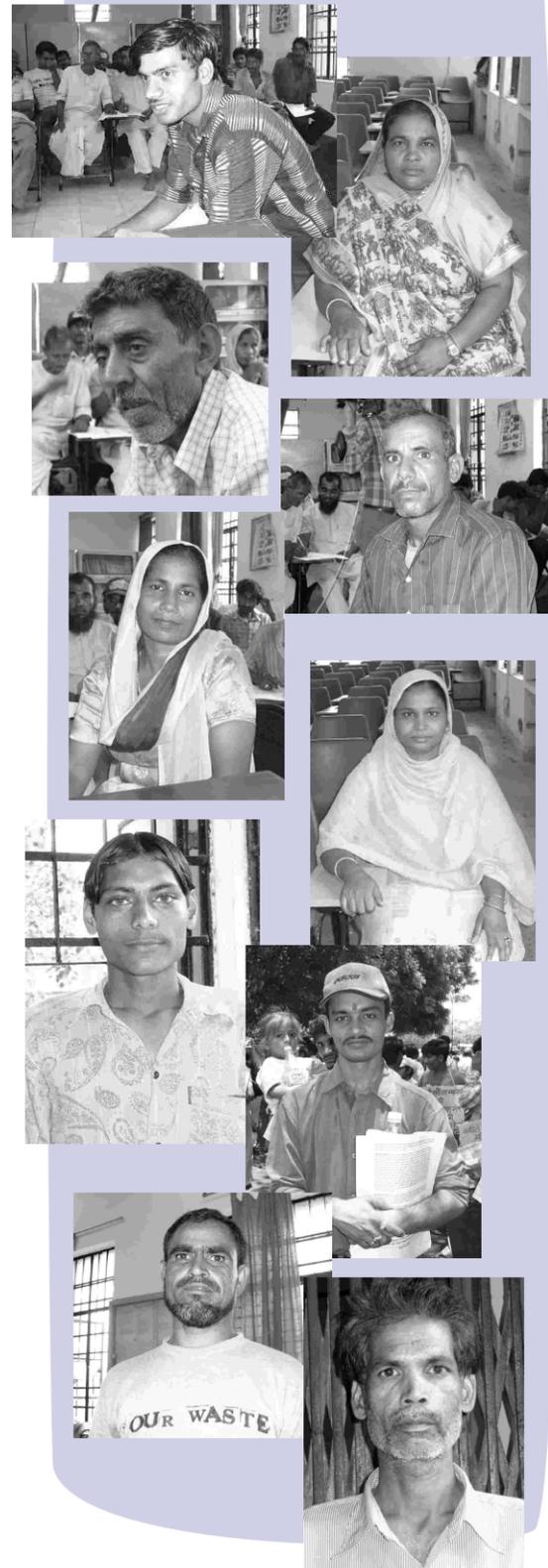
In the last one year, one of the newest initiatives has been related to the idea of leadership. Shifting away from the dominant framework of political leadership, Chintan worked with approximately a 1000 waste pickers to discuss and debate the idea of leadership. In all, 65 workshops were designed and held with 2406 footfalls. The idea of this initiative was not merely

to recognize the leadership role offered by the poorest communities under the hardest circumstances, but to get a larger group thinking about the importance of leadership as it works at the grass roots as a strategy of fortification, to be able to contribute to the larger group and hence, strengthen everyone's chances of an improved life and security. These communities then identified persons whom they considered leaders from their own areas. Finally, a shortlist of 50 waste recyclers with leadership qualities was identified by the larger group. In the next stage, a short listing process will be undertaken and leadership awards announced. This is just the start of a process which is expected to feed into our project process of building long term groups that can look after their own best interests.

### Collective Identities

Our annual reports of the last two years clearly show how we have been constantly exploring ways to explain complex ideas and systems to communities of waste pickers and recyclers. Our legal workshops, group building and communication workshops and workshops related to

Some of the waste recyclers with leadership qualities



municipal functioning and rules governing waste have been innovative, inclusive and integral to how far the recyclers have been able to fend for themselves. Some of the results have been easily discernable-the legal workshops have helped create a marked difference in the way by which people approach the police. Similarly, the work with the police has also been insightful because it lays clear the systemic reasons for friction and hostility between police and recyclers. Often, this exercise also helped see the short term solutions and enabled us to reorganize the groups for the path of least hostility. Other workshops showed slower results: understanding the rules related to waste actually leads to framing an identity as cleaners of the city, for those who have carried out municipal duties without any recognition.

But what more? One of the most important learning emerging from this set of workshops was that of the need to work such that these rules were implemented on the ground. In other words, re-working the ways in which we work.

**This last year, Chintan held 56 workshops on these issues and community based 603 meetings in all.**

## CARVING OPPORTUNITIES

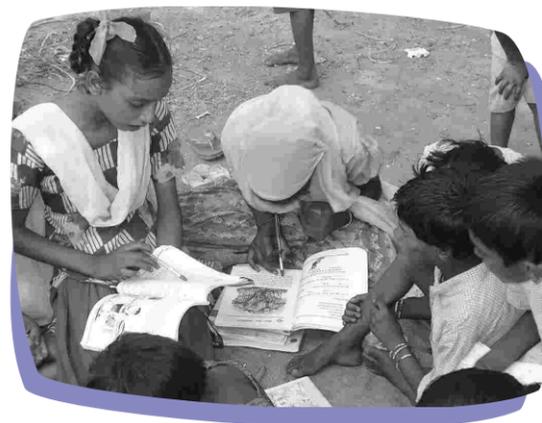
**It is well accepted**, even by the least cynical amongst us, that the more marginal you are, the less opportunity knocks on your door. You therefore have to carve out opportunity from the matter around you. Chintan's central thrust is to help waste recyclers make the shift in the changing city in front of us, creating dignified opportunities for environmental service providers from amongst the urban poor. We have divided up opportunity into two realms: one for children, and the other for adults.

### Opportunities for Children

Chintan hopes that there will be no Gen Next, as far as waste picking is concerned. This means identifying new opportunities. As we stand today, we believe there is no better opportunity for anyone than education.

Chintan works with young waste pickers to help them phase out of this hazardous occupation and prepare for cleaner work. In order to do this, we have set up three highly experimental learning centres in Delhi : Pilanji, Takiya Kale Khan and

Nizamuddin. Approximately 300 children are a part of this outreach. Currently, we work at 3 levels, depending on the child itself. We offer bridge classes to help children prepare to join formal schooling, ideally in a class where they will be close to the average student age. We also offer



support classes, so that children don't drop out. And then we help older children to access National Open School teaching, if they cannot join school. Additionally, Bal Panchayats (or children's forum) are held in the community, adding onto the quality of education of the child and monthly meetings with their parents, where they exist, also create support for the

programme. The teams also do outreach, where they visit the child's home to ensure things are going well and to reassure the family of the importance of the child's education.



Last year, 67 children joined formal schools and 13 joined the National Open School System. This was thrilling because all of them were waste pickers. A few of them were able to do this because of monthly fellowships they were offered. This included bulk paper to sell or rice and pulses to feed a family of 5. Getting these fellowships is much harder than we believed. Many partnerships, such as that with the Confederation of Indian Industry, never took off despite our best efforts. Luckily, others were successful. Amongst those who joined in the scheme last year were Laburnum Housing Complex, Gurgaon, Spirit, Connaught Place, The Sriram School in Vasant Vihar, Sanskriti School, Salwan Public School, and several individuals.

Although Chintan dreams of a day when no child works in a trash bin, we know it's unlikely to happen in the near future. However, we want to bridge that distance of time. Our strategy has been, therefore, to help other organizations learn from our experiences, save their time by not making

our mistakes and reach out to more children. To do this, we worked towards creating a manual of experiences. This manual, Carving Opportunities, helps the user to plan and implement a holistic initial programme for waste picker children.

We currently have 3 learning centres, with nearly 300 children enrolled in all. We hope to expand only slowly, as expansion means a long term commitment to the children and the associated resource-raising. To create a greater impact, we hope to work with more organizations, so that it is clear that Delhi has fewer children working as waste pickers each day.

### It Had to Happen

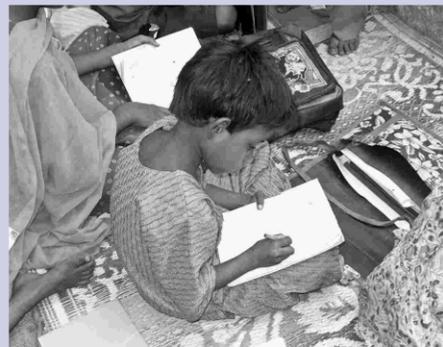
Janal is a young 13 year old ex-waste picker who spent the last two years picking waste in Delhi's sprawling Lajpat Nagar Market. Till he was 10, he studied in a government school in another area. When his shanty home was destroyed, he and his younger siblings found it impossible to get admission into another school near their relocated home. This sad turn of luck forced him to become a waste picker. Fortunately, as part of Project Arman, Chintan came in contact with Janal's father, Samad Ali. Consequently, all three children were helped to join the nearby government school and helped to join the support class Chintan runs, so that they don't drop out. His father says, "Had I not met Chintan, my children would have never gone to school again."

## Class Toppers You won't Know

Takiya Kale Khan, just a few kilometers from the historic Old Delhi, is a happy surprise. In this learning centre, most of the learners are girls who come to study after the morning's work. In fact, apart from the 52 students, there are 14 mothers who also come to learn regularly. Two of the biggest surprises have been Samina and Farzana. Twelve year old Samina was a part time waste picker, part time beggar, coaxed gently into Chintan's bridge course despite her indifferent family two years ago. Samina learned quickly and joined the nearby public school, where she has topped her class for the last two years. Farzana was forced to scavenge waste with her mother and sister till Chintan began its earliest learning centre near her home. Fortunately, her mother was supportive and helped her to stick in class. Like Samina, she too enrolled in the closest primary school and has topped her class since. In the heart of Delhi's Diplomatic Enclave, three other former waste pickers have scored very high results in their government run school in Moti Bagh : Moonu, Annupriya and Priyanka have all scored above 60% in school, a high grade by all Indian standards.

## Project Arman

Sometimes, what it takes is a citizen who decides that something must be done. This is the story of how Project Arman began. In November 2005, we joined hands with Arjun Sharma, who has been deeply concerned about the right to a dignified life for children, and launched Project Arman in the Nizamuddin Basti Area. The objective is to reach out to 250 children and help them access education as well as support them in diverse ways so that they may stop working and be able to exercise their basic right to a dignified and safe life. Given the flexibility the initiative offers, we have been able to attempt diverse strategies, including taking time to know each child and be able to respond to his or her needs. This has allowed us to reach out to 130 children from January 2006, when the staff was prepared and on the field. Additionally, to add sustainability, we have also begun to work with the mothers of these children, so that they can facilitate their children's education from home.



Nizamuddin is an area of contrasts. Despite being home to a popular Sufi shrine and drawing several thousand

Contd >

## Opportunities for Adults

A common feature faced by many developing countries is the fate of the urban poor. Chintan has been dialoging with organizations from Egypt, Brazil and the Philippines, only to hear the same stories repeated. In a way, the waste recyclers of the world share a common global concern- in a rapidly transforming world, **What Happens Tomorrow?**

The work of the last one year has been challenging, because it calls for strategies that are new and diverse, in keeping with the changing city itself. For example, despite the fact that waste is being privatized, and the associated displacement of the informal recycling sector is becoming apparent, Chintan is exploring livelihood opportunities that can take advantage of the inherent skills of a waste recycler. One of the important shifts this year has been the expanded number of partnerships we have been able to forge and the success of these in enhancing both our work and our capacity.



In order to do that, we have been training up waste pickers and other recyclers to understand waste as a means, not an end.

Project Arman Contd...

international visitors annually, it is also home to some of the poorest people in the New and South Delhi Area. Many of them are waste recyclers living precariously on the edges of a turgid drain. Their homes are giant pipes under bridges, their walls corrugated cartons. In the monsoon, these homes are washed away and the only shelter are the trees in a nearby park. Project Arman reaches out to the children living and working in these extraordinary circumstances and is one of Chintan's most challenging areas of work.

## Ramzan Ali

Ramzan Ali's parents are waste pickers. They work in the shadow of the Oberoi Hotel, a plush and elegant part of Delhi. Ramzan spent much of his life right next door to the hotel through the last several months. He was a student of the blind school there.

Many other children in his shoes would have become waste pickers. Not so with Ramzan. If you're blind, you're not much use as a waste picker. So he stayed at home, under a drain. A child seeing nothing and doing almost nothing. After Chintan helped him secure admission here, he appears more confident than ever. Hopefully, his life is moving towards better things.

Our door to door waste collection work has expanded, with almost 70 persons picking up waste from just under 40,000 households in the New Delhi area. They are supervised and assisted by Santraj, the most literate person amongst them. His challenges range from how to ensure that the municipal collection trucks pick up all the waste, to helping the waste collector to segregate waste optimally. Santraj also



receives complaints and sorts them out. In order to do this, however, Santraj has had to give up his own work. The waste pickers have therefore decided to pay him through small contributions of their own.

Meanwhile, our housekeeping work has expanded to more locations, mostly linked with sites of tourist and shopping interest. Chintan has also seen an increase in the number of short assignments it was invited for.

Not all our efforts have been direct interventions. Often, we feed into other's work. Last year, the ITC Hotels set up a loom that recycles plastic bags into diverse products. While they were looking at the possible beneficiaries, Chintan identified team of 4 waste picker women who lived

in the vicinity and who could be trained by Mauyra Hotel, as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility, to use the loom as an income generation device. As a result, the plastic bags being generated within the hotel premises have been used for artisanal re-use purposes and four women have been trained under this scheme.

However, our biggest focus this year was on preparing for such services. As Chintan expands, we require more quantitative systems that can be run by both communities and the Chintan staff itself, in order to monitor the services we provide and to constantly upgrade our quality. This preparation included identifying the gaps of knowledge, creating elementary systems and training ourselves to set up new services in organized stages. This is expected to lead us to creating the Chintan Services Wing in the next three years. We believe that this will be an important approach in addressing the issue of informal sector livelihoods in the new city.



## PREVENTING THE POISON WITHIN

**Chintan** has considerably strengthened its work on public health this year. Our emphasis has been two fold. Firstly, to explore and explain the linkages to those who are impacted. Secondly, to work on the ground and explore the change that can be made and replicated there. The central concern this year, as previously, has been related to toxics and their insidious creeping into our lives, resulting in what seems like a public health crisis in the making. Our four distinct but interconnected initiatives this year were mainly focused on building the capacity of the impacted populations, literate or otherwise and bring the issue further out into the public realm.

### The Poison Within

Chintan frequently finds studies from around the world that warn of how a child today is a chemical time bomb. Most of these studies have little to do with India. Moreover, very few of these studies are ever accessible to the average parent or teacher in India. Every Indian parent needs to know how the environment is impacting their child and to learn to understand what protection in this broad case means.

Fortunately, the Ministry of Environment and Forests shared some of our ideas and agreed to sponsor a manual on children's health for parents and teachers. The manual was divided into the following sections: Why Indian Children are getting sicker than before, Traditional Diseases, Air Pollution, Known Toxics, Emerging Toxics. A cross section of doctors, teachers and parents reviewed it before it was finally ready for publishing as *The Poison Within*.

Protecting Children from the onslaught of toxics has been Chintan's mission for a long time. Besides the manual, we have also been speaking about the issue vociferously at a range of platforms, from school based interactions to citizens meetings.

### Stealthy Intruders

Another new and innovative manual was brought out on the issue of toxics and women's health. In particular, the family of Persistent Organic Chemicals was explored for their impact on women. This manual was particularly important because it showed the insidious nature of POPs and their ability to get under the skin. And

## Special Vulnerability of Children to Toxics

Children are at higher risk than adults of being exposed to hazardous substances and of suffering adverse health effects as a result of their exposure. Their activities expose them more to hazardous substances that might be in water or soil. Their height puts them at a level where they are more likely to breathe dust and vapours close to the ground. Also, small children often put their hands in their mouths, which can allow contaminants into their bodies orally.

Children's smaller body size and developing systems also place them at greater health risk than adults. Because they are smaller, children receive higher doses of toxicants per pound of body weight. Pound for pound, children drink more water, eat more food, and breathe more air than adults do. Many organ systems in young children, such as the nervous system and the lungs, undergo rapid growth and development in the first years of life. During these periods of development, their organ systems are especially vulnerable to injury. Of special concern is exposure of the foetus, whose organ and body systems are still developing. Environmental toxicants are thus a growing cause of preventable illness in children globally.

In the case of children, research reveals that early exposure to the following toxicants can cause a variety of health and learning disorders.

- **Benzene** the most common organic solvent and a common constituent of diesel, causes leukemia and possibly other cancers.
- **Environmental tobacco smoke** can raise children's risk of ear infections and breathing problems and trigger asthma attacks.
- **Lead**, commonly used in batteries, medicines paints, and cosmetics, causes learning and behavioural problems
- **Mercury**, commonly used in thermometers, dental fillings and paints can lead to cerebral palsy, severe mental retardation, neuro-developmental delays, and seizures.
- **Nitrates and nitrites** cause methemoglobinemia (the decreasing capacity of the blood to transport oxygen).
- **Household and agricultural pesticides** can cause cancer, birth defects, and nerve damage.
- **Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)** are used in electrical transformers and in machines and contact can lead to lower intelligence quotients (IQs) in children.
- **Trichloroethylene (TCE)**, commonly used in dry cleaning of clothes, is associated with hearing loss and delays in speech development.

remain there for generations. India has signed the POPs convention, better known as the Stockholm Convention and is obliged to safeguard its citizens from these. If we need to hold our government accountable, we need to be better informed. It was in this spirit of the Right to Information that we produced the manual.

## Dioxins at the Grassroots

It's a common sight all over India to see PVC coated copper wires being burned to extract copper, one of the most expensive metals in the international market. The problem with this is that this activity releases dioxins, one of the most harmful gases known to mankind and certainly, one of the chemicals listed for a phase-out under the Stockholm Convention.

## Stealthy Intruders

Women have a right to decide whether or not they want to have children.

What happens, though, when they are debarred from making that decision? And what if the force debarring them is not a patriarchal society, chauvinistic men, guilt or social conditioning, but a group of chemicals?

How extraordinarily terrifying to live in a world where noxious chemicals, perceived by many as an aspect of modernity, dis-empower you so completely! The only thing more terrifying in this case is that it's actually happening.

A family of chemicals called POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) have been found to exactly this tyrannical. And it's not their only vice. POPs have been linked with many reproductive and other health problems, ranging from breast cancer to reproductive disorders.

Chintan's Manual on the impacts of POPs on Women's Health is the first of its kind in India. Here, we've focused on how women's health is severely impacted by these chemicals. There are many reasons why: with widespread chemical contamination, women bear the double burden of disease. Apart from the physical and psychological impact it has on them, they pass sit onto their children, whose linked illness adds to their work and even, depletion of resources. Typically, discussions around women's health in India do not include toxics, a gap we are contributing to fill up.

It is rare for an international compact to be so closely linked with the state of our daily lives as the Stockholm Convention is. Remembering that India is a signatory to this pact is important. Understanding what this implies is critical, because it has been done by our government, in our name and in our interest.

In India, such burning takes place across neighborhoods everywhere. Most commonly, this is seen outside the shanty shops of small junk dealers. Chintan undertook an initiative with the International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), as part of its work on bringing toxics into the public realm and demystifying the issues. The initiative was simple-it required Chintan and HRA to work with junk dealers to train them to understand the problem of POPs and reduce the POPs as they are generated or handled.

A total of 21 workshops, meetings and discussions were held in various parts of Takiya Kale Khan, in Central Delhi, Harikesh Nagar in South Delhi and in some parts of West Delhi. The original intention of a register was not created as a parallel idea was already in progress with the police and two registers was hard for a population that is largely illiterate and depends on the odd literate worker to help update the register. Besides, we also decided against implementing it as it became clear that there was only one important source of POPs from junk dealers. The next stage of the campaign requires a wider campaign to seek legislation against the use of PVC and promoting safer alternatives, even if they happen to be safer forms of plastic.

## He had a crooked, fleeting light in his eyes, like that of mercury

The presence of Mercury in the informal recycling sector in India is not unlike the crooked, fleeting light that writer-philosopher Primo Levi mentions. It is scarcely ever seen, and most descriptions of this are based on hearsay and just a few glimpses amidst a lifetime of waste picking.

## Localizing International Conventions

We worked with 100 junk dealers and itinerant buyers, helping them to understand how toxics impact them. At first, we undertook a survey to understand how they perceived the problem, if at all. The results were startling: it was clear that over 50% of them were aware that burning copper wires was a polluting activity. However, exactly how polluting was not clear.

Based upon this information, we held discussions about why wires were burned despite knowledge about its hazards. It became clear that the narrow wires were difficult to cut, compared to the thicker ones. Although we located junk dealers who hired special wire cutters, many of the wires that were being cut were thick ones. Besides, PVC, laden with phthalates, softens considerably in the summer and is easier to cut. The problem comes in the winter, when thin wires require to be burned and thick wires are much too hard to be cut easily. Hence, the winter sees much more wire burning and hence, increased dioxin production from this source. Another factor that determines when a wire can be burned is the size of the wire. Small pieces are mined out of bins but regardless of their thickness, their copper cannot be extracted without burning. Given the price of copper, (almost Rs. 55 per kilo, or over 1 dollar and 10 cents) it is always out of the question to let wires be. Hence, burning was typically found to be the only feasible option. This forces us to ask how else dioxin production can be reduced in this context? There is only one answer: producers of copper wire should shift out of using PVC as insulation. We require greater government intervention and industry responsibility if we are to handle dioxin from this sector.

Most mercury traders or even waste pickers picking up mercury procure it from hospitals and other similar institutions. Although they have little knowledge about the toxicity of Mercury, there is a sense that it is incorrect, in some legal way, to pick it up or deal with it. Moreover, there is also a clear understanding of Mercury within the sector: they know what it is, what it looks like and other physical attributes, and can recall whether or not they have ever found it/traded in it. In fact, a Chintan study undertaken in 2003 indicated that 6% of children and 16% of male adults were able to clearly recall having traded in mercury. Ironically, most of them also thought that hospital waste caused only some minor breathlessness and did not link up the two.

Hence, a third initiative in the work on environmental health was related to Mercury. Chintan undertook a study on Mercury and its movement in the informal sector. Although the study was limited by its time line of 3 months, the emerging picture was cause for concern:

- It was clear that there is a trade in Mercury within the informal sector
- There is no doubt that waste mercury enters the mercury materials cycle via the informal sector
- This sector is highly likely to have been exposed to mercury. Their health is likely to have been damaged by this. This is particularly true for waste pickers and small junk dealers
- Given that there is no responsibility for the life cycle of their products on the part of producers of items such as mercury thermometers, fluorescent lights, etc. it becomes clear that the informal sector bears the brunt of handling their dirt.
- What was surprising was that there are many well established ways to deal with Mercury as a waste product. However, these are not applied here and there is no Extended Producer Responsibility in place

- The prices at the level of the junk dealer showed great disparity, from Rs. 300-Rs.1000, suggesting a difference of 3 times. This could be due to the lack of knowledge about pricing, the erratic trading of this material at this level and hence, no set models to follow and the import of Mercury, which reduces local pricing.

The study therefore shows how the informal sector is being forced to bear the brunt of poor Extended Producer Responsibility on part of a range of companies. Clearly, there is an urgent need for such policy that protects public health.

## IPEN

Chintan's works on the POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) issue has intensified in the last one year, both as our own capacity is built up and our work in the area expands. This is on account of a partnership with the International POPs Elimination Network, or IPEN, a global network of public interest non-governmental organizations united in support of a common POPs elimination goal. The mission of IPEN, achieved through its participating organizations, is to work for the global elimination of persistent organic pollutants, on an expedited yet socially equitable basis.

Founded in early 1998 by a small number of NGOs, IPEN was formally launched with a public forum at the first session of the UNEP Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC1) in Montreal in June 1998, convened by UNSP to start negotiations to develop a global, legal instrument to control and/or eliminate persistent organic pollutants (POPs). Throughout the course of the five negotiating sessions, the network grew to include more than 350 public health, environmental, consumer, and other non-governmental organizations in 65 countries. The network worked to mobilise grassroots support for a global treaty to eliminate POPs.

## I AM THE PROBLEM, I AM THE SOLUTION



**The Bharti Foundation** entered its third cycle of partnership with Chintan, to create the Chintan Bharti Waste Resource Centre. The CBWRC is a small, highly experimental initiative that seeks to help people find solutions to their specific concerns related to waste and consumption. In the last one year, it has grown considerably in its outreach.

Many of the older initiatives continued here as well : Wastewatch, the newsletter continued to be mailed out electronically. Its most recent themes included the Diaper Boom, Hazardous Waste Imports, Mercury and Plastics, all available from our website. The library expanded dramatically to include 3251 titles, from all over the world. A complete list is on the website.

Our work with schools continued. We worked directly with approximately 3000 school children and indirectly impacted about 10,000 school children. The schools we worked with this year included Salwan Public School, Presentation Convent, Sanskriti School, Banyan Tree school, Bal Bharti School, The Sriram School, the Delhi Public School, Gurgaon, Sardar Patel School and various schools of the New Delhi

Municipal Council, viz NP Coed Senior Secondary School (Ansari Nagar), NP Coed Senior Secondary School (Moti Bagh), NP Coed Middle School (Netaji Nagar), NP Coed Senior Secondary School (Kidwai Nagar) NP Coed Senior Secondary School (Nauroji Nagar) NP Coed Girl's School (Bapu Dham). More generally, our stalls at local Eco Club Meets and other spaces have been visited by 37 schools and approximately 500 children in all.

As always, there were requests from other agencies for talks, presentations and waste audits.

Vishwa Ahimsha Sangh invited the Centre to give a presentation on the occasion of Earth Day and Mahavir Jayanti on 21st April 2005 to their members. The Minister of Transport and Power Mr. Haroon Yusuf was the Chief Guest for the occasion. Around 300 students from the Sangh's Institute was also part of the event.

The Kerala House requested us to carry out a waste audit to help them reduce the waste they generate. One of the good practices being followed by them was that of composting all garden waste.

Switchmasters India were also audited for their waste handling. We were happy to find that they were careful to minimize their waste.

The Defence Colony Market Association also requested for help in explaining the idea of segregation to kitchen staff in the many restaurants. This was done over a 2 month period.

We know that organic waste is one of the biggest problems in Urban India today. Although it can be composted, there is little confidence in composting per se, despite optimal conditions. To address this, the CBWRC held workshops and trained 77 persons from 32 Residents' Welfare Associations directly in three kinds of composting techniques-aerobic, anaerobic and enzyme composting.



Newer initiatives included work with artists. KHOJ, an international network of new media artists and the CBWRC collaborated on an international art camp on the theme of environment. A small presentation was created as so was a waste tour. Five artists, from Scotland, Sri Lanka, Denmark and India, participated in a 3 week workshop. Of these, one make an installation specifically about plastics and the other made one on sustainable materials that

could be recycled. Hence it was dismantled. A third made a short film on waste pickers.

The CBWRC was requested by Fountainhead Solutions Pvt. Ltd., consultants to the Ministry of Forests and Environment and the India Habitat Centre to help facilitate and provide materials and information for a workshop with children on the occasion of the World Environment Day on 5th June 2005. Approximately 100 children from around 7 states participated in the workshop. Chintan's contributed by providing games, quizzes and bringing in working children into the programme, to diversify the idea of environment. One school working with Chintan was also included. The children waste pickers performed a play and children from both backgrounds found themselves listening to diverse understandings of the environment.

Such work is small, slow and localized. But the point of the CBWRC is to create a ripple effect, to popularize the idea that waste can be and should be handled in sensible ways if we want our cities to be livable. This hands-on approach is one of the most effective forms of environmental and civic education possible.



## MANY ARMS, ONE VISION

**This annual report** might leave you asking a few questions. You might find that the work we describe leaves you confused about the nature of Chintan as such. Is Chintan a mass of waste pickers? Is it an advocacy group? Is it a team of trainers? How can it be such a mix?

Chintan is an organization that facilitates recyclers to organize themselves into distinct groups and skills them to take their own issues forward, with help, whenever we need, from us. This was already beginning to be clear from our last two annual reports, where Chintan was clearly devising and holding workshops for the waste recyclers. In the same period, we also described how the Harit Recycling Association, (HRA) was being formed and being made into an independent entity. In other words, we run a partnership with the recycling sector.

In the coming year, we are preparing to shift the many grassroots groups we have created from the Chintan umbrella to that of an organization of their own. This seems to be the only way by which communities can be self-representational. This means that there will be greater self-reliance, capacity, knowledge and networking within such groups and of these groups with

others. When this happens, we would have begun to meet one of our central missions: finding dignified opportunities in urban spaces. Best of all, it will be a sustainable change.



Chintan's experiences and partnerships will continue to inform its work on advocacy, research and creating greater networks. We are also exploring new ideas, as this report will demonstrate: children's environmental health, for example. We are currently mapping the linkages between waste, waste recyclers and toxics, understanding how these can be strengthened such that public health is decisively impacted by our work. This is the other Chintan mission.

And of course, No Child in Bins remains something we are determined to work on harder and harder. Our strategy is to increase to one more learning centre and train up more groups for a nominal fees so that they can also enhance their work with children waste pickers.

Reorganizing and restructuring Chintan itself has been an important move from within. We were able to find the coordinator we have been looking for since the last one year. Consequently, this coordinator has taken over the Management and Coordination of work. The Director has now begun focusing on organizational capacity building, advocacy, research and total quality systems for many Chintan operations.

Chintan has also worked with its core team to create up to date systems for the organization, such that we are all able to work within the same framework despite our differing areas of work and everyday functioning is smoother and decision-making more transparent.

**Our core team this year has been:**

- Bharati Chaturvedi
- Lavanya Marla
- Kiran Kampani
- Abhay Ranjan

- Shashi Bhushan Pandit
- Kamla Upadhaya
- Binod Kumar
- Chandni Khanduja
- Pritha Ghosh
- Syed Arshad Rizvi
- Santraj Maurya
- Parvez Alam
- Ram Singh
- Vibha Gupta
- Rajesh Singh
- Sweetie Jaiswal
- Ranjan Sree Chaudhury
- Parveen Kumar
- Yogesh Kumar
- Santu (Jai Prakash Chaudhury)

Besides this, we have used the help of several consultants from time to time. Other persons have been working on occasion, based on their time and convenience. Our volunteers have been many, and them we have thanked in another overflowing section.

**Our Management Committee was expanded this year and now comprises:**

- Sudhir Varma
- Arun Nagpal
- Ritu Prasad
- Yamini Gupt
- Vandana Madan

**The Board members continued into the second year of their term:**

- Ravi Singh
- Sanjeev Bhikhchandani
- Bharati Chaturvedi
- Ashish Rajpal
- Alok Chopra

**The Advisory Board comprises:**

- Vir Sanghvi
- Gauri Ishwaran
- Rajeev Chandrashekhar



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Davesh Shrivastava, DCP North East District  
Irshad Haider, ACP Nand Nagri Area  
Jai Kishan Gautam, SHO Seemapuri Police Station  
Vir Singh Tyagi, SHO Nand Nagri Police Station  
Swanther Kumar, ACP Kamla Market  
Central District  
Sanjay Tyagi, ACP Sarita Vihar  
Tajender Luthra, DCP Crime and Railway



This Annual Report has been printed on environmentally friendly handmade paper, made from natural fibres and a variety of paper, cloth and agriculture waste. The unconventional size of the report has been chosen to minimise paper wastage. The report has not been laminated for a smooth matt finish to avoid the use of plastic. The font Frutiger 45 Light (used here for composing the text) helps to minimise the use of printing ink.

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