

HARITHAKARMA SENA - A WOMEN LED MOVEMENT DRIVING SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

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Abstract

The Harithakarma Sena, a dedicated team of Kudumbashree women, plays a pivotal role in this effort. In collaboration with local self-governments (LSGs) and the Suchitwa Mission, they focus on the collection, transportation, processing, recycling, and disposal of waste, primarily inorganic. With 1018 units across Kerala, Harithakarma Sena is actively involved in public awareness, providing composting guidance, and ensuring doorstep collection of non-organic waste. Additionally, they support organic waste management and are exploring new income opportunities through green enterprises. Their efforts, under the supervision of various state missions, contribute significantly to Kerala's goal of sustainable waste management, with initiatives like recycling non-recyclable plastic waste for road construction. This abstract highlights the integral role of Harithakarma Sena in driving Kerala's journey towards becoming a waste-free state.

Keywords: *harithakarma sena, local self-government, suchitwa mission, kudumbashree, zero waste*

Introduction

Kerala, a state in southern India, generates approximately 25 lakh tonnes of waste every year. Of this, 69% constitutes organic waste, while the remaining 31% is inorganic. Organic waste in the state is heavily moisture-laden, with about 70% of it containing moisture, making it challenging to manage and dispose of effectively. On the other hand, the inorganic waste has a combustibility rate of 79.2%, meaning that a significant portion of it can be incinerated or used as a fuel source. Despite the challenges posed by the nature of the waste, Kerala is committed to achieving the status of a zero-waste state.

To achieve this goal, waste management activities need to start at the household level, particularly in urban areas where waste generation is highest. Proper disposal of organic waste at the source is crucial to minimize the environmental

impact and reduce the burden on waste management systems. Various projects and initiatives have been implemented across the state to support this vision of zero waste. One of the most critical components of these efforts is the formation and deployment of the Harithakarma Sena.

The Role of Harithakarma Sena in Waste Management

The Harithakarma Sena plays a pivotal role in Kerala's journey towards becoming a waste-free state. This professional team consists of Kudumbashree women, who are responsible for the collection, transportation, processing, recycling, and overall management of waste materials. They work closely with local self-governments (LSGs) and the Suchitwa Mission to ensure that waste management processes are effectively implemented.

Harithakarma Sena primarily focuses on the collection and processing of inorganic waste. Currently, there are 1,018 Harithakarma Sena units operating across Kerala. Of these, 926 units are based in rural areas, while 92 units operate in urban regions. The total workforce comprises 23,546 women in rural areas and 4,678 women in urban areas. This substantial force of women plays a crucial role in managing waste at the grassroots level, ensuring that waste management activities are carried out efficiently and sustainably.

Activities and Initiatives of Harithakarma Sena

The Harithakarma Sena is engaged in a variety of activities aimed at promoting sustainable waste management practices. One of their primary responsibilities is raising public awareness about waste management. They conduct educational campaigns and workshops to inform the public about the importance of proper waste disposal and the benefits of composting organic waste at home. By educating the public, they hope to reduce the amount of waste generated and encourage more people to adopt environmentally friendly practices.

In addition to raising awareness, the Harithakarma Sena also provides guidance on composting systems that can be installed in homes and institutions. Composting is a key component of Kerala's waste management strategy, as it allows organic waste to be disposed of at the source, reducing the need for transportation and processing. The Sena helps households and institutions set up composting systems and provides the necessary equipment to ensure that organic waste can be effectively managed at home.

Another critical role of the Harithakarma Sena is the collection of non-organic waste from households. They ensure that non-organic waste, which is kept clean by households, is collected regularly. The Sena members visit households at fixed intervals to collect

the waste, which is then transported to designated material collection centers. A user fee is charged for this service, as determined by the local bodies. This fee helps to sustain the waste collection and management activities carried out by the Harithakarma Sena.

Addressing Challenges in Waste Management

Waste management is not without its challenges, and the Harithakarma Sena plays a vital role in addressing these challenges. They assist households in dealing with issues that arise from the disposal of waste at the source. For instance, if a household encounters difficulty in managing organic waste, the Sena provides guidance and, if necessary, seeks the assistance of Green Aid Institutions. These institutions offer specialized support to ensure that waste disposal processes are carried out smoothly.

In addition to their waste management duties, the Harithakarma Sena is also exploring new income-generating opportunities. One such initiative involves the establishment of Green enterprises that manufacture new products from waste materials. By converting waste into valuable products, the Sena is not only reducing the amount of waste that ends up in landfills but also creating economic opportunities for the women involved. This initiative aligns with Kerala's broader goal of promoting a circular economy, where waste is minimized, and resources are reused and recycled.

Sustainable Waste Management and Leadership

The activities carried out by the Harithakarma Sena are part of a larger effort to promote sustainable waste management in Kerala. These efforts are led by local bodies and supervised by the Suchitwa Mission, Haritha Kerala Mission, and Kudumbashree. The collaboration between these organizations ensures that waste management activities are carried

out effectively and in line with the state's overall vision of zero waste.

In each local body ward, there are at least two members of the Harithakarma Sena assigned to manage waste collection. Each member is responsible for collecting non-biodegradable waste from approximately 250 households. By maintaining a regular collection schedule, the Sena ensures that waste does not accumulate in households or on the streets, reducing the risk of environmental pollution and public health issues.

Once the waste is collected from households, it is transported to a mini material collection center. From there, it is further transported to a larger material collection center, where it is sorted based on its characteristics. The waste is segregated into different categories, such as H.M White, P.P, H.M, LDPrint, Bajar, Ganny, Bulb, PVC, steel, tubes, bottles, e-waste, LD (Glucose), bottle caps, spray bottles, and more. This meticulous sorting process ensures that different types of waste are processed and recycled appropriately.

Recycling and Resource Recovery

Recycling is a key component of Kerala's waste management strategy, and the Harithakarma Sena plays an important role in facilitating this process. Local governments collaborate with companies that can recycle specific types of plastic waste. The plastic waste collected by the Sena is handed over to these companies, where it is processed and converted into new products. This not only reduces the amount of plastic waste that ends up in landfills but also contributes to the conservation of resources.

For non-recyclable plastic waste, Kerala has established resource recovery centers. At these

centers, the waste is shredded and used for road construction. This innovative approach not only provides a solution for disposing of non-recyclable plastic but also contributes to infrastructure development in the state. By finding new uses for waste materials, Kerala is demonstrating its commitment to sustainability and resource conservation.

Conclusion

The journey towards a zero-waste Kerala is a challenging but achievable goal, thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Harithakarma Sena and the support of local bodies, Suchitwa Mission, Haritha Kerala Mission, and Kudumbashree. Through their work, the Harithakarma Sena is not only managing waste effectively but also empowering women, promoting sustainable practices, and contributing to the state's overall development. As Kerala continues to implement innovative waste management strategies and explore new opportunities, it is setting an example for other states and regions to follow in the pursuit of environmental sustainability.

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