

BBC Media Action launches a new virtual address for residents of Bengaluru to connect with their 22,500 invaluable friends

Bengaluru, April 15, 2021: BBC Media Action today launched 'Invaluables' - a communication initiative designed to shift perceptions about waste picking and informal waste pickers in the city of Bengaluru. The programme aims to lift the shroud of invisibility that cloaks informal waste pickers, by making their contribution to the city of Bengaluru more visible to the general public. The programme is part of the H&M Foundation-funded Saamuhika Shakti Collective Impact initiative, intended to improve the lives of informal waste pickers in Bengaluru.

BBC Media Action's formative research showed that the people of Bengaluru do not recognise the humans behind the process of informal waste management, despite caring deeply about waste on the streets. While people are generally appreciative of formal waste collectors, Bengaluru's *pourakarmikas*, the research showed a high level of stigma against informal waste pickers, who are virtually invisible to the people of Bengaluru.

Speaking about the 'Invaluables' initiative, **Priyanka Dutt, Country Director, BBC Media Action, India**, said, *"For informal waste pickers to experience greater social acceptance, we believe that there is a need to change the way the people of Bengaluru think and feel about waste pickers. Through the 'Invaluables' initiative, we hope to help people travel a journey - from waste pickers being seen as 'dirty', to being recognised as doing important, skilled work that contributes to society and the environment."*

Eminent residents of Bengaluru author Anuja Chauhan, actor Radhika Narayan, cricketer Robin Uthappa, digital content creator Shradha Jain and actor Shweta Changappa have joined the intensive two-month initiative.

Central to this initiative is a social experiment that connects people to an 'Invaluables' Facebook community. Actress Radhika Narayan moderated the social experiment with a diverse set of Bengaluru residents, probing their notion of friends and the value of friendships. The experiment reveals the 'Invaluable' friends of the people of Bengaluru: friends who always stood by them, but that they never knew they had.

On the development of the social experiment, **Radharani Mitra, Global Creative Advisor, BBC Media Action** added, *"Waste pickers and the role they play in our lives are invisible - on social media and elsewhere. We conducted the social experiment to play up this difference and to highlight that waste pickers do as much as for us as those we think of as our friends. We hope this experiment and the Invaluables group will help shift how waste pickers are seen: from being invisible, to being invaluable."*

Speaking on the campaign, **Radhika Narayan, Kannada film actor**, said, *"During the pandemic, it became even more evident that waste pickers protect our homes and localities by removing waste that could be potentially harmful to us. They do it at great risk even now. Before conducting this social experiment, even I wouldn't have realised the kind of difference they are making to our lives."*

Anuja Chauhan, eminent author and a resident of Bengaluru who has also joined Invaluables Facebook community said, *"Waste pickers serve an important societal function by picking up, cleaning, sorting and segregating recyclable waste and selling it further up the value chain. But they lack social acceptance and*

dignity. Society registers only the dehumanising filth and squalor in which they eke out sustenance. Creating societal recognition of their work as having economic and environmental value is important. We need to truly see them as invaluable to society and to the community at large and accord them due respect.”

The ‘Invaluables’ Facebook community seeks to build connections between Bengaluru and its waste pickers, by revealing more about their lives, stories, work and talents.

*“The Saamuhika Shakti project, through collaboration with multiple stakeholders, aims to address the many challenges faced by the waste pickers in a holistic and sustainable manner. One of the challenges is the indignities they suffer due to a lack of knowledge of and respect for the invaluable role they play in the waste management eco-system. We, along with our partner BBC Media Action, invite the residents of Bengaluru to be a part of the Invaluables programme and become change agents for an equitable Bengaluru for all its citizens,” said **Lakshmi Pattabi Raman, Executive Director, Saamuhika Shakti, The/Nudge Foundation.***

Maria Bystedt, Strategy Lead, H&M Foundation added, *“An important pillar of our work is the belief that communication in itself can be a change maker and spark action. It can contribute to changes in beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, and even policies and regulations. We are proud to partner with BBC Media Action and support the ‘Invaluables’ campaign which we believe is an important piece of the puzzle to improve the lives of waste pickers. For a sound and robust waste management system to exist, there needs to be recognition of those that carry that system on their shoulders.”*

India’s information technology hub and the capital of southern Indian state of Karnataka, Bengaluru is home to over 22,500 waste pickers. According to Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, Bengaluru generates nearly 5,757 metric tonnes of solid waste per day. Despite being a critical part of the city’s solid waste management ecosystem, the waste pickers and their families suffer a lot of hardships and challenges.

BBC Media Action’s intervention is part of the larger Saamuhika Shakti initiative that aims to improve the quality of the lives of informal waste pickers. The vision of the initiative is 'to enable the waste pickers' community to have greater agency to lead secure and dignified lives.

About BBC Media Action

BBC Media Action is the BBC’s international charity that uses media and communication for good. We reach more than 100 million people each year in some of the world’s poorest and most fragile countries. Our projects and programmes save lives, protect livelihoods, counter misinformation, challenge prejudice and build democracy. Using a human centred design approach, our work is rooted in evidence, powered by insights, and leverages impact-tested, scalable, big ideas to create social and behaviour change. In India, over the past two decades, we have delivered impact in health (HIV prevention, tuberculosis diagnosis and treatment, reproductive, maternal, neonatal, and child health), sanitation, gender equity, climate change and the prevention of bonded labour.

About Saamuhika Shakti

Saamuhika Shakti, the initiative in solidarity with waste pickers, aims to enable waste pickers and their families in Bengaluru to have greater agency to lead more secure and dignified lives. Saamuhika Shakti follows the Collective Impact approach which refers to the commitment of a group of actors from different sectors coming together for a common agenda, and to solve a specific social problem at scale.

Seven partner organisations, BBC Media Action, CARE India, Hasiru Dala, LabourNet, Save the Children India, Social Alpha and WaterAid India, have joined hands under this initiative to take a holistic approach to improve the living conditions of informal waste pickers. The initiative also focuses on ensuring that women, girls and other vulnerable groups have equitable access to the outcomes. Saamuhika Shakti is program-managed by The/Nudge Foundation, and funded by the H&M Foundation.