

Call to decentralise waste management

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Srinivasan does a demonstration on the SLRM concept at the workshop | P Jawahar / Express

Decentralisation in the management of garbage was the focus of a workshop that was held in the city on Monday. Officials from various local administration bodies in and around the city witnessed a presentation on the involvement of civil society in the process, and discussed the various practical difficulties in setting up the suggested ward-level garbage segregation and treatment units across the city.

The idea for the ward-level processing units was the central advocacy of the workshop, titled 'Strengthening Participatory Approaches in Municipal Solid Waste Management in Tamil Nadu', organised by Athena Infonomics, a consultancy and research firm with former IAS officials as advisors.

Speakers at the workshop showcased a model that had been implemented in Vellore, and has since been adopted in parts of Gujarat and Sikkim.

They also called for a paradigm shift in the perception of garbage. "The wastes should not leave a ward. They can be handled locally in processing centres set up in each ward. This way, only six percent of the total garbage generated would have to be sent to the dumpyards," said C Srinivasan, project director of the Indian Green Service, which spearheaded the project in Vellore.

"The problem arises with the current problem. Wastes are not garbage, but a resource. Solid waste has so far been treated by governments as an engineering problem, instead of a

sanitation, health, environmental or civic problem,” added Srinivasan, a member of the State Planning Commission’s Steering Committee on Solid Waste Management.

Once segregated, the wastes are of great value and could provide income for local bodies and provide employment to local communities, apart from working out as a comprehensive way to keep cities clean, he said.

Local administration officials, however, outlined the various practical difficulties in implementing such an effort. According to them, acquisition of land would turn out to be the biggest stumbling block for the setting up of such segregation units in each ward.

This started a discussion between the representatives of the consultancy and the officials on how these practical difficulties can be solved. At the end, even as the officials seemed to disagree with the points discussed, they said they would take another look into the proposal’s feasibility in their respective areas.