

Waste Business



The biogas plant at the Tata Institute of Social Science was started with Rs 10 lakh approved by the institute.

NARENDRA VASKAR

Three young TISS entrepreneurs' zero-waste project on campus expands, promises to generate employment opportunities for 3,000 ragpickers

MIHIKA BASU

An interest in waste management is shaping into a full-fledged business venture for three friends at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS). In the final year of their Masters in Social Entrepreneurship, the three, who are also engineers, have recognised that 'waste is unrecognised wealth'.

Sampurnearth Jayanth N, Debartha Banerjee and Ritvik Rao started off by exploring a waste management project for Bandra Reclamation area. Land hiccups stuck the project and led them to focus on their own campus.

"Last year, we started working on a project with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) whereby the entire

waste of Bandra Reclamation had to be managed and the dry waste had to be sent to recyclers after segregation. Land was to be given by BMC, but it got delayed and the project was stuck. We then turned to different private entities like corporate offices, townships, housing societies and also our campus at TISS, Mumbai," said Jayanth.

TISS approved the zero-waste campus idea and funded it. "The institute gave Rs 10 lakh with which a biogas plant (based on BARC technology) was set up next to the dining hall," he said. Instead of sending waste generated mainly at the dining hall to dumping grounds, it is segregated. Wet waste is used to generate biogas and manure and dry waste sent

to recyclers to be converted into useful products, thus creating a zero-waste campus.

"The three of us are engineers and while exploring various options for our venture, we looked at waste management and saw a lot of technological and scientific solutions. Their environmental and social implications were immense. Waste can be converted into many

useful products and one can simultaneously create economic opportunities. Once we got into waste-management and started executing projects like the one at TISS, there was no looking back," said Banerjee.

Biogas generated at TISS is now used for cooking. "An estimated 15 kg of LPG equivalent would be produced daily to be used for cooking purposes on campus. About 40 kg manure produced daily would be used in TISS gardens. We also plan to market the manure outside," said Jayanth. Non-biodegradable waste like plastic and glass is collected and sent to recyclers.

Paper waste is recycled and sourced back to be used for products like notepads and envelopes for TISS.

Along with Stree Mukti

Sanghatana, an NGO working with waste-pickers, the three are now setting up business ventures and working with 25 corporate houses and several housing societies. They are in talks with three institutes in Mumbai to

movers & shakers

replicate their zero-waste project.

"Every unit should be paying back after a few years. The TISS project for instance will save Rs 1,000 worth LPG everyday. Instead of buying manure, one gets the best quality manure for horticulture. The recycled products include stationery that can serve needs of corporate houses and institutes," Banerjee said.

They are in the process

of formalising a partnership with the NGO, which works with 3,000 ragpickers. While the NGO has helped organize them into 300 self-help groups and made cooperatives, the TISS student-entrepreneurs are looking at increasing their employability and productivity.

"The ragpickers make Rs 100-150 daily, but work is limited and cannot be guaranteed everyday. We plan to formalise their work and give them regular income and better working conditions. While the NGO will continue to organise them and take care of their health and education needs, the business end will be handled by us," said Jayanth.

The ragpickers will be employed for various waste management services, including TISS, thus ensuring they have a regular source of income.

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