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(MODEL ANSWER)

- Q. Evaluate the role of informal waste collectors in mitigating plastic pollution and discuss how the Global Plastics Treaty can support their integration into formal waste management systems.

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Answer Template:

Introduction:

- Plastic pollution is a global crisis affecting our environment, health, and economies.
- Informal waste collectors are individuals or groups who gather recyclable materials from waste streams for income, often operating outside formal waste management systems.
- According to a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), informal waste collectors contribute significantly to waste management worldwide, with estimates suggesting they handle up to 90% of recyclable materials in some developing countries (UNEP, 2018).

Body:

- **Critical Role of Informal Waste Collectors**
 - **Environmental Impact:**
 - Informal waste collectors play a crucial role in mitigating plastic pollution by diverting plastics from landfills and oceans through recycling.
 - *Example: In India, the "ragpickers" in Dharavi, Mumbai, collect plastic waste from streets and landfills, reducing the amount of plastic entering water bodies.*
 - **Economic Empowerment:**
 - Informal waste collection provides livelihood opportunities, particularly for marginalized communities, contributing to poverty reduction.
 - *Case Study: The "waste pickers" in Brazil's favelas form cooperatives to collectively collect and sell recyclable materials, improving their socio-economic conditions.*
 - **Informal Recycling Networks:**
 - Informal waste collectors operate within intricate networks, efficiently collecting and sorting recyclables.
 - *Example: In Cairo, Egypt, Zabaleen communities have established a sophisticated system for recycling, with each member specializing in different materials.*
 - **Resource Conservation:**

- By recycling plastics, informal waste collectors conserve resources and reduce the demand for virgin materials.
 - *Case Study: In Thailand, informal waste collectors known as "tok-tok" drivers collect plastic bottles, contributing to resource conservation efforts.*
- Community Integration:
 - Informal waste collectors often have strong ties to the communities they serve, fostering social cohesion.
 - *Example: In Manila, Philippines, "Basura Bags" initiative encourages community members to segregate waste, supporting the efforts of informal waste collectors.*
- **Integration measures by Global Plastics Treaty:**
 - The Global Plastics Treaty aims to address plastic pollution by promoting cooperation among nations to reduce plastic waste.
 - The treaty could include provisions to support the integration of informal waste collectors into formal waste management systems through capacity building and financial incentives and other measures like: -
 - Capacity Building:
 - Providing training and resources to informal waste collectors can enhance their efficiency and safety standards.
 - *Case Study: The "Waste to Wealth" program in Ghana offers training in waste management and entrepreneurship to informal waste collectors.*
 - Financial Incentives:
 - Offering financial incentives, such as subsidies or tax breaks, can encourage formalization of informal waste collection activities.
 - *Example: The government of Colombia provides grants to cooperatives of informal waste collectors to invest in equipment and infrastructure.*
 - Public Awareness:
 - Raising public awareness about the contributions of informal waste collectors can garner support for their integration into formal systems.
 - *Case Study: The "Waste Wise Cities Campaign" in Kenya educates communities about the importance of recycling and supporting informal waste collectors.*
 - Technological Innovation:

- Harnessing technology, such as mobile apps for waste collection scheduling, can improve the efficiency of informal waste collection.
- *Example: The "Reciclar" app in Brazil connects informal waste collectors with households for efficient waste collection and recycling.*
- Multi-stakeholder Collaboration:
 - Collaboration among government, private sector, and civil society is essential for successful integration of informal waste collectors.
 - *Case Study: The "Waste to Energy" project in the Philippines involves partnership between local government, private sector, and waste pickers to convert organic waste into energy.*
- Monitoring and Evaluation:
 - Regular monitoring and evaluation of integration efforts are necessary to assess effectiveness and address challenges.
 - *Example: The "Informal Waste Sector Observatory" in South Africa collects data on informal waste collectors to inform policy and decision-making.*

Conclusion:

- The informal waste and recovery sector (IWRS) is more than a minor player in worldwide municipal solid waste management systems.
- As a key representative from the Global South, India promotes an approach that enhances repair, reuse, refill, and recycling without necessarily eliminating the use of plastics altogether.
- India's informal waste pickers, who are indispensable, remain central to the discussion. Hence, we need to rethink the formulation of our EPR (Extended Producer Responsibility) norms & raise questions on how to integrate this informal worker cohort into the new legal framework. By recognizing & empowering informal waste collectors, we can enhance effectiveness of efforts to combat plastic pollution and create more inclusive and sustainable waste management systems globally.

Related News/ Editorial/ Article (THE HINDU):

- *Remoulding the Global Plastics Treaty. - (Page 8)*

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