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Report Summary

Why audit waste?

Bhutan is situated within top ten global hotspots of eastern Himalayas. We are today known to the outside world more for the contributions we have made towards environment than for any other modern developments and inventions. It is in this respect that Bhutan has earned the image of ‘Champions of the Earth’ for preserving its pristine Environment. What more can one hope for in the area of conservation when the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan in itself ensures maintenance of a minimum of sixty percent of Bhutan’s total land under forest cover for all time to come.

While we can take pride in achieving such monumental heights, we can not afford to remain complacent. Today the reality is that we are faced with many environmental challenges. One such pressing issue is the waste management.

Generation of waste is an inevitable aspect of modern development. With rapid urbanisation, change in consumption pattern and drifting rural-urban migration, the challenges in managing waste has far surpassed the municipal authority’s capacity and competency to manage it. Generation and composition of waste has increased by manifolds over the last decades.

Therefore, the Royal Audit Authority embarked on auditing this critical issue hoping to add value by recommending best practices of waste management. The audit was focused on two growing municipalities of Thimphu and Phuentsholing. Nevertheless, RAA hopes that these recommendations, if practical can be replicated to other emerging municipalities and aid them in managing solid waste in much systematic and scientific manner.

The main objectives of the audit were:

- To establish the composition and quantities of generation of wastes;
- To measure the effectiveness of existing waste management systems; and
- To identify opportunities for improving waste management systems and strategies.

What RAA found?

The team visited Thimphu and Phuentsholing City Corporations and applied the normal auditing techniques such as review of documents, interviewing, personal observation and walk-through tests of the system. Audit findings are categorized into common and specific observations. The common ones are those which are common to both the municipalities and others are specific to individual municipality. The significant findings are briefly stated below;

- ↻ Both the municipalities have not maintained any records on solid waste. In absence of such records RAA was not able to conduct proper audit of the waste management system.
- ↻ There were multiple agencies involved in framing policies, rules and regulations with no proper co-ordination among themselves. The rules and regulations at times were found to be inconsistent and vague.
- ↻ The existing Rules and Regulations on solid waste, despite being inadequate, were not enforced. They were also found to be more of punitive nature.
- ↻ Thimphu and Phuentsholing municipalities though independent administratively, did not have information sharing system which could be mutually beneficial to each other.
- ↻ Generally, people lack appreciation on management of solid waste and are of the notion that it is the municipalities sole responsibility to manage wastes.
- ↻ Landfill at Memelakha, Thimphu has crossed its estimated life by almost 7 years and currently operating more as an open dump site than a landfill.
- ↻ There are several areas within the Phuentsholing municipality where wastes are being dumped illegally. Some of the glaring examples are the areas near sewage plant, below truck parking, storm water drain and the backyards.
- ↻ Phuentsholing City Corporation had not formed a Municipal Committee as of date. The mandate is pronounced in Bhutan Municipal Act of 1999.
- ↻ Of all wastes, construction waste is the most neglected one. Contractors dump the unwanted materials at the place of their convenience; often on road side, in the construction site vicinity and river sides.

What RAA recommends?

The Royal Audit Authority would like to recommend the following measures in light of above observations:

- Maintain proper records on management of solid wastes. Appropriate formats could be worked out to facilitate easy and timely recording of data.
- To have continual and synchronized co-ordination amongst agencies framing environmental policies and emulate the policies through appropriate rules and regulations. These agencies also need to work very closely with implementing agencies such as Municipal Corporations and Royal Bhutan Police. Municipalities in the country should have some form of information sharing platform on management of solid waste.
- Municipal authorities need to strictly enforce the existing rules.
- Co-ordinated campaigns on solid waste need to be initiated to educate people. As of now only ad-hoc campaigns by Non-Governmental Organisations were found initiated.
- The municipal authorities in collaboration with the related agencies should come out with appropriate policies or regulations to deal with the growing problems of disposing obsolete/out of date stocks and goods.
- Thimphu Municipal Corporation should identify a new site for landfill with utmost urgency.
- Breakdown of sewer lines across Dooti river should be repaired immediately
- The Phuentsholing City Corporation should make concerted efforts to stop illegal dumping of wastes at non approved sites.
- The Phuentsholing Municipal Corporation should also work with Jaigoan town authorities to stop illegal dumping of waste unto Bhutanese territory.
- Construction and Demolition(C&D) wastes need better management strategies. Municipal Corporation or National Environment Commission could draft a guideline or rules on managing C&D waste.