On the occasion of International Women’s Day, South Asian Forum for Environment-SAFE pledged to bring the lives of women rag pickers, the most vulnerable section of the society in limelight and discuss their journey from being a victim of exploitation and abuse to becoming successful green entrepreneurs through SAFE’s Resolve Trash2Cash program peaking for the epitome of empowerment.

Resolve Trash2Cash’ is a real life case study of empowering women street dwellers of Kolkata metropolis, launched in 2011. This program trains the women to recycle waste from the city’s dustbins to make micro-utility household products. The revenue generated from them helps in supporting the monthly stipend of communities involved & in the sustenance of this green initiative.

This event on 8th March, witnessed a union of voices to celebrate the journey of Resolve Trash2Cash, at an open public platform charged by musical band, Nishaan’, only to salute the thousands of women ragpickers. An exhibition was held of the recycled products made by our Resolve: Trash2Cash (RT2C) team of women and an interesting Panel discussion was organized on the topic ‘Women Rag pickers: The journey from invisible to invincible’ which was attended by reputed social activists from across the city.

Our honourable panelists and Guests:
- Ms. Maina Bhagat- Director, Oxford Book Store
- Ms. T.S. Raji Gain- Chief General manager, NABARD
Dr. Dipayan Dey, (Moderator) Chair, SAFE,
Ms. Dolon Ganguly-Director, AZAD
Ms. Kasturi Roy Choudhury-Social Entrepreneur and activist
Ms. Paramita Saha-Director, Arts Forward
Ms. Madhuchhanda Deb- Councillor, Ward no. 92 & social activist.
Ms. Amrita Chatterjee-Project Leader Resolve Trash2Cash.
Maya di (Once a rag picker, now a trained artisan and trainer of the RT2C Women team)

The purpose of the event was to highlight the importance for especially to honour the bravery and determination of the women rag pickers turned skilled artisans under our Resolve: Trash2Cash Programme. Furthermore, not many are aware that Kolkata has the highest garbage pressure in the country that equals to 16.5 tonnes per Sq. Km; that is 5372 metric tonnes of municipal solid wastes per day rendering an average contribution of 1.40 kg per head per day. However, only 700 ton of MSW are collected and recycled every day and rest goes to the landfills. These 4500 metric tons of garbage is scavenged by human beings of whom 78% are women of age 8 to 80 who are constantly vulnerable to serious diseases and victims of social ignorance and exploitation. Through this event, SAFE also wanted to salute those 38 thousand women ragpickers who are still struggling to survive in the dark and to celebrate womanhood, to rejoice the power, strength and dignity that epitomize a woman.

During the panel discussion, some major points were highlighted by our panelists. Ms. Dolon Ganguly, Director of Azad spoke about the urgent need for public awareness about the concerned issue and the need for greater public support and participation help empower the women rag pickers. Ms Kasturi Roy Chowdhury added to this saying that these women rag pickers, being the most vulnerable section of the society are still struggling for a better life and it is our support that can help them emerge. The CGM of NABARD, Ms. Raji Gain genuinely appreciated the talent of the skilled women rag picker turned artisans working under RT2C Programme and called them 'First generation artisans' and their work, 'products of high innovation'. Ms. Paramita Saha stressed on the value of waste & the need for segregation and responsible disposal of waste which will help in its maximum recycling. Ms. Amrita Chatterjee, the project leader of RT2C spoke about the huge potential of these women under RT2C and their prospective to turn into excellent artisans and entrepreneurs. She further added that these women can now earn their livelihood with safety and dignity. Dr. Dipayan Dey stressed the need for us to become better human beings and take a responsible role in empowering these women. Maya di, a living example of woman empowerment under RT2C programme exclaimed, 'I am happy now!'

The programme ended with the felicitation of the panel by the RT2C Team followed by the panelists awarding the empowered team of women entrepreneurs under RT2C Programme with a small token prize for their undaunted courage and determination.

Unanimously everyone agreed that, ‘The planet needs more humanly humans to spur change and realize life transforming results on the ground. We shouldn’t make an effort to have better ragpickers or waste workers rather, join hands to catalyze a sustainable future for them, “Women for entrepreneurship”.

South Asian Forum for Environment
Phone: +91 33 24229699  mail: office@safeinch.org  web: www.safeinch.org