

# Power of Community

## Source Segregation: First Step for a Sustainable Community



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The immaculately manicured grounds and impeccably maintained common spaces of DLF The Crest belie the fact that the project generates 2T of waste every day. With that magnitude, it qualifies as a Bulk Waste Generator (BWG) according to the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016. As recently as 2020, waste management on the premises was like most other establishments of its type: housekeeping staff collected mixed waste from each apartment and handed it over to collectors from the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG). Their job done, its fate beyond was of no further concern.

“We used to introduce The Crest as a ‘green building,’” says Ritu Joshi, General Manager, Services, about the project’s design, construction, and performance to environmental, energy, human health, and other global standards. Being awarded LEED Gold Certification by the US Green Building Council in 2019 was a feather in her cap. As a resident of Ghaziabad who



Credits: Saahas

Community Engagement Programme at DLF Crest



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Credits: Saahas

#### House Keeping Training on Waste Management Practices at DLF Crest

often drives past the Ghazipur landfill, she is committed to becoming an agent of change. When she met Saahas' Alag Karo (AK) team in 2020, she says "Our vision was similar. We wanted to do something big".

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With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic precluding the possibility of larger gatherings when the programme was launched, residents were invited in small groups to the orientation. Alag Karo's awareness posters featured prominently throughout the premises, with Korean and Japanese translations for expat residents. The community management app and Whatsapp groups were used to circulate information. Housekeeping staff and housemaids were trained on source segregation in Hindi and Bengali since most of the latter speak Bengali. Boxes for e-waste were placed in common areas and plastic collected door-to-door twice a week. At the time of writing, 91 bags of plastic had been diverted from the landfill for the week. Events, featuring Mr Environmental, the project's live mascot, along with games, participation certificates and candy for the children, were organised

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to keep the buzz alive. Progress continues to be shared regularly to instill segregation as second nature. “Sharing success stories is very important,” Joshi says. “When we share where we started versus a 90% improvement six months later, it really boosts morale.”

The community’s verdant kitchen garden, winner of DLF’s Best Kitchen Garden award recently, is a testament to the success of The Crest’s composting initiative. Bright green with lashings of purple, it is lush with organic vegetables. Bumper crops of basil, lettuce, broccoli, bok choy, cauliflower, rocket and celery make their way regularly to the community clubhouse. The glorious outcome of the community’s involvement in its sustainability is evident at its coffee mornings. The vegetables, gardens, lush landscaping all have their roots in the wet waste the residents segregated. “We process the wet waste in our crusher machine to make compost, which we give our residents for their home gardens. We also use it in our gardens *jisse ki hamare gardens chamakte hain* (our gardens sparkle). With the training, everyone has understood that we need to segregate. It’s made our work much faster because we don’t have to manually separate the waste anymore,” says Mohammad Naz, a houseboy.



Credits: Saahas

Top View of DLF Crest

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Although the system has evolved into a well-oiled machine, Joshi is keenly aware that it must be closely monitored. “I get a monthly segregation report that shows if there’s a drop and we step up the awareness and training, which is part of our Training Needs Identification. Staff and residents come and go so we have to keep the buzz going,” she maintains. While initiating a campaign of this nature is relatively easy in a community that is educated and possesses the resources for new infrastructure, not everyone is amenable to changing old habits. When the houseboys requests to uncooperative residents go ignored, Tahir, Head, Housekeeping, makes house calls himself. When these fall on deaf ears, penalties are imposed on the offenders.

The crowning achievement for Joshi has been to steer The Crest towards becoming the largest residential community in the world to be awarded LEED Platinum certification. She’s quick to point out that it’s a “collective effort”. Mr. Tahiruddin Ali shares her pride, saying, “We thought we were competing with societies in Delhi-NCR, but we’re number one in the world. I don’t think any other society segregates and sorts to the extent that we do – plastic, newspaper, cardboard, glass bottles, e-waste. We sent all the documentation for the Platinum certification”.

The resounding success of source segregation at The Crest gives it pride of place as a model for other developments. “Unlike many other societies,” says Anchal Das, Project Coordinator at Saahas, “this team was very driven to become sustainable. They cooperated from the beginning, wholeheartedly implementing our recommendations. Segregation levels can fall if Residents’ Welfare Associations (RWAs) don’t invest the time or cost. The combined effort of the RWA, estate management, residents and support through the Alag Karo project made it so successful here”.