

Ragbags make inroads into European markets



A Ragbag at work

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AMSTERDAM: It's a rags-to-riches tale. Goods made with recycled plastic from the streets of Delhi are making inroads into European markets.

Backed by innovative but simple designs of young European designers and collective efforts of slum children from India's capital, the initiative is catching up in the Netherlands and Germany. And orders are coming in from even Latin America.

Marketed under the name

Ragbags, these products provide a large number of families' a means of livelihood and an opportunity to get empowered. It is a simple process of collection of plastic waste by rag-pickers, who deposit it at collection centres. There it is washed and cleaned and fabricated into products without adding dyes, chemicals or colours.

The initiative, under the name of Conserve India, is in partnership with the Indian couple Anita Ahuja and Shaleb Ahuja.

The couple, with the exper-

tise and assistance of Dutch designers and entrepreneurs, have turned waste plastic, often seen as polluting the environment and choking drains, into plastic sheets and refashioned them to high-end products.

"This has not only provided slum-dwellers in Delhi with increased income levels but ensured that something that is treated as garbage and polluting has been turned into bright colourful handbags, sling bags, rug-sacks, wallets, purses and other products," Ragbag director Siem Haff-

mans told a group of visiting Indian journalists.

The products are fetching good money: sling-bags and shoulder bags go for around €50 in the Netherlands, Germany and Brazil. Wallets and small bags fetch €20 to €25. "We are constantly working not only on the marketing aspect of the Ragbag products but also new designs keeping in tune or ahead of the market trends. We have been flooded with orders from various parts of Europe and Latin American countries," he added.

Ragbags are positioned to appeal to young, fashionable "post-materialist" consumers, who are aware of the problems the world is facing but are positive and willing to change it in a better way. Ragbag products are being sold to shops in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Haarlem, Den Haag, and Utrecht) and Germany.

ID-L inspired innovations have an Amsterdam-based design office founded in 1992. ID-L initiates and realises creative innovations inspired by social issues.