



Supporting and strengthening junk dealers and recyclers

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IN 1973, the City Government of Manila passed an ordinance regulating scavenging in the city by requiring scavengers to operate in non-tourist area and secure permits. Otherwise, they would be fined (P20.00 to P100.00) and/or imprisoned from one to six months.

Scavengers are an integral part of the junkshop-recycler network. These junk shops and small recyclers have come a long way as waste managers. Now, they are being recognized by the larger community as agents for urban environmental protection. There is a growing realization, at the national and local levels, that the alternative waste pathway through junkshops and recyclers is more beneficial for the common good of the public, the government and the environment than the usual waste collection and disposal system currently being managed by the government through dump trucks and landfills. There are about 1000 junk dealers and about 300 recyclers in Metro Manila.

This paper has three major topics, namely, 1) previous government projects dealing with junk shops and pushcart collectors; 2) efforts of NGOs and individuals in supporting and strengthening this informal sector; and 3) some legislative agenda for junk shops and recyclers.

Past experiences that formalize the recycling activities in Metro Manila

In July 1978, the Cash for Trash Program was presented to the Minister of Human Settlements by some concerned citizens. The plan was to implement a solid waste separation and resource recovery program. The original plan envisioned the use of the existing informal system of resource recovery as the cornerstone of the proposed plan. A budget of P 1.8 million (approximately US\$200,000) was released to fund the Program.

During the implementation, the plan was modified. Instead of using the existing informal system of resource recovery, the implementors under the office of the Deputy Minister of Human Settlements created a parallel system to directly compete with the informal system. Eco-aides were recruited as collectors. A single recycling corporation was established to buy all the recyclables from the 30 eco-centers (read junkshops) that were subsequently established.

Barely two years later, in 1980, all the eco-centers closed shop. Analysts were in agreement that the primary cause of failure was the adverse reaction of the existing informal system most notably the junkshop dealers to the project.

Implementors of the aborted project failed to give importance to the role of the informal system in the recycling of waste materials. As a result, the junkshop dealers felt threatened by the establishment of the project because they were left out of it. The dealers saw to it that the eco-aides sold their collection of waste materials to them by giving these eco-aides better prices than the buying prices of eco-centers. The eco-aides then returned to the eco-centers declaring that they failed to buy anything.

Some dealers that were interviewed also attributed the collapse of the program to the alleged graft committed in the procurement of fixed assets for the eco-centers. Eco-aides were provided overpriced pushcarts, overpriced weighing scales, overpriced warehouses, etc. These purchases led to the depletion of the seed capital needed by the eco-aides to buy the waste materials.

Overall, the collapse of the project could be traced to the failure of the program to integrate or include the informal sector into its program hence the kind of reaction and competition that it had not bargained for.

Private initiatives by NGOs

In 1983, the Women's Balikatan Movement of the Philippines started organizing existing junkshop dealers in San Juan, Metro Manila using the original concept of the CASH-FOR-THRASH program, that is, to buy recyclable items as part of their aim to protect the environment.

The Balikatan campaigned for waste separation at the household level, started to organize the junk shops in a Metro Manila municipality and link them with residential communities to make the collection of recyclables more efficient. It acted as guarantor in behalf of the junkshops so lending institutions would provide them some credit for working capital. It also popularized the term 'Eco Aide' to refer to scavengers and pushcart collectors, thereby highlighting their role in ecological care.

At the start of the project, Balikatan got the cooperation of the municipal government of San Juan. Upon instruction from the Mayor, community assemblies were convened in each of the 21 barangays (local districts) of San Juan to explain the concept of solid waste separation and the benefits that it will give to the households. Discussions were held on how to increase solid waste recovery. Permission was obtained from the government water utility company for the use of one of its vacant lots as a junkyard or collection center.

Now, Balikatan operates in other municipalities of Metro Manila. The group has started to organize the junkshops into cooperative to avail of government subsidies and credit and enable them to get better deals with bigger junkshops and recyclers and even formal institutions.

Through the intercession of Balikatan and other groups, other government support has started to pour in. The Department of Trade and Industry is in the process of approving a P250,000.00 (US\$9,000) soft loan package for Eco-Aides to be used as working capital in their daily chores of buying recyclables from households. Recently, the Department of Social Welfare and Development field office in Region 3 released the P100,000-livelihood financial assistance to a group of Eco-aides as seed capital for income-generating projects.

Other NGOs have joined in. The Ayala Foundation, Inc. wants to campaign for the change of name of junk dealers to 'waste managers'. Waste separation from the source is now becoming a popular campaign of many NGOs specially the Recycling Movement of the Philippines and the Ecology Center through their community-based Zero-Waste campaigns. Business and civic organizations, like the Rotary Club, are also willing donors to community-based waste management drives.

Recently, the Center for Advanced Philippine Studies (CAPS) launched a project creating a Waste Management Resource and Information Center (WMC). The idea of a WMC arose two years ago when individuals, NGOs and home owners started inquiring from CAPS where to sell or what to do with various waste materials. Before that, CAPS conducted studies on recycling and urban environmental management through communities and NGOs. Apparently, CAPS then became known for waste management matters.

This center will primarily serve as the main repository of data and information on solid waste management. It will have a computerized on-line inquiry system on junk shops and recyclers available to anybody. The second major activity is the Information and Education Campaign where waste segregation, and the role junk shops and recyclers will be promoted. Another major component is the training of community leaders and organizers on solid waste management. Although the center will be managed by CAPS, it will be sensitive and will cater to the needs of the eco-aides, junkshops and recyclers, as well as other waste conscious NGOs and entities.

Maybe of interest to this conference is the question of affordability and feasibility or sustainability of such an information center. The WMC got its initial funding from a corporate foundation. The grant was enough to launch the project and sustain the Center for one year. Last April, we conducted a strategic planning workshop to plan for the years to come.

First on our list of 'Do's' is institution building. This means inviting personalities in the private and government sectors known for their commitment to environmental concerns to join the Center as officers and Board

members and/or sponsors. Given their stature and influence, they can help generate donations, grants and/or endowment funds for the Center. This also means employing dedicated and qualified personnel to run the program.

Second is the program itself. Our vision for the Center is for it to become a technology clearing house, a training venue, and a research and development institute for solid waste management. Anytime anyone thinks of waste management, the WMC should come to mind. The Center should be able to sustain itself through its services. WMC can enter into service contract agreements with city or municipal governments, corporation home owner associations and NGOs to help them formulate waste management plans and train their personnel. WMC can also raise funds through research contracts and subscriptions from its publications.

Last but not least is to obtain government support for the program. Recently, the information office of the national government endorsed our radio ad for free airing in 20 radio stations that has national coverage. We hope to enlist government support for other components of our information campaign through television and the print media. This is as good as approved because others, such as the Recycling Movement of the Philippines and the Green Forum Philippines, have already obtained government endorsement. Another venue of support is in publication. Under negotiation with the Quezon City Government is the printing of our 3-R's handbook.

Legislative agenda

As mentioned, the government has begun extending a helping hand to junkshops, eco-aides and NGOs in their various ways of curbing solid waste. The good news is that even the legislative branch of the government has joined the crusade.

There are now a total of eleven (11) congressional bills, seven in the Senate and 4 in the Lower House, pertaining to waste segregation, reduction, recycling, handling and disposal of solid and liquid waste. The salient points of these bills which are pertinent to this paper are: 1) the formulation and implementation of an integrated (national and local) solid waste management program for waste minimization, 2) inclusion of waste segregation, reduction, composting and recycling in the school curriculum, 3) tax exemption for all anti-pollution and recycling devices, 4) year-end awards to government agencies and private organizations for outstanding projects, 5) use of recyclable materials in the packaging of consumer products, 6) prohibition of the manufacture and use of styrofoam food containers in all food establishments, and the 7) regulation of the manufacture, distribution and use of non-biodegradable plastic bags.

We are still waiting for a bill that will regulate or ban the importation of waste materials for recycling since they depress the market for locally collected recyclables. The livelihood income of the eco-aides and junkshops are

significantly lessened when there is a glut of such imported waste materials.

Conclusion

The role of junkshops, eco-aides and recyclers in environmental protection are now being positively recognized by the larger community, unlike the time they were looked down upon and threatened by government established competition. Because of their perseverance, they now represent an effective alternative to the dominant but expensive way of collection and disposal of waste. The

NGOs and the government sector have come forward in their support through credit assistance, organizing, research and publication, media promotion and legislation. I sincerely hope the trend continues so they would become an integral part of the management of waste in the urban centers, that is, through legislative action on waste segregation and minimization, the eco-aides, junkshops and recyclers will soon become the dominant players in the management of solid waste. Through them, the income from waste collections and disposal will be democratized or decentralized from the few politically favored operators.