

Solid Waste Management Badly Needed in Myanmar¹

Asia's urbanized areas produce about 760,000 tons of solid waste daily, and are expected to be more than double by year 2025. And that is not even the worse case scenario.

According to the World Bank, municipalities in developing countries spend 20-50% of their budget on solid waste management. Sadly though, 30-60% of urban solid wastes in Asian countries remain uncollected and less than 50% of the population served. In some cases, as much as 80% of the trash

collection and transport equipment is non-functional.

Despite the palpable urgency to solve this issue, local governments in third world countries are stumped in the achievement of an effective solid waste management system (SWMS) in urban areas for several factors. These factors include lack of funds and resources, community involvement, collective and participatory planning, technical know-how of staff, discipline on the part of waste producers, and updated policies.

A Microcosm of the Waste Management Concern

Yangon City, the capital of the Union of Myanmar, exemplifies an alarming neglect of this waste management issue. Currently, the City has a population of 5.5 million with an annual growth rate of about 2%. More people mean more waste. Rapid urbanization and population growth renders the City's human health and environment vulnerable to the effects of inefficient waste management system.



Seinn Lei Aye, in her dissertation titled “Strategic Solid Waste Management Planning for Yangon City, Myanmar”, defined solid waste management (SWM) as the “generation, storage, collection, transfer, and transport, processing, and disposal” of solid waste, according to social and economic needs and environmental standards.

In the case of Yangon City, the municipal area generates approximately 2,900 tons of solid waste daily, with a daily collection efficiency of 54%. The average waste generation of public sector is about 0.53 kilogram per capita per day.

Yangon City’s SWMS is “centrally implemented, labor-intensive, and uncontrolled.” The Pollution Control and Cleansing Department (PCCD), under the Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC), administers and performs the municipal SWMS. The 33 Townships in the City are classified into 4 Districts - North, South, East and West. PCCD maintains offices in each township, and each township also executes waste collection, street sweeping, and transportation practices.

The current system, however, proves inadequate. This lack of an adequate SWMS in terms of planning, legislation, capacity building, and low level of awareness on environmental management, obsolete equipment, and insufficient budget, among other limitations, is quite alarming.

High Cost. In the 2003-2004 Financial Year, the Yangon City SWMS incurred a total expense of 1.2 million US dollars to collect a total waste volume of

245,098 tons. Meanwhile, the system recovered a mere total of 0.98 million US dollars.

Lack of Technical Know-how. Aside from the high cost of the overall SWMS, waste management officials and staff lack the proper know-how on waste management technologies and have not yet fully grasped its social, economical, and ecological implications.

Outdated policies and legislations. For an SWMS to be adequate and effective in a rapidly growing city such as Yangon, there has to be a strategic plan. Unfortunately, legislation on Yangon City’s SWM was formulated way back in 1922, and nothing else followed ever since. This legislation is contained in Sections 111 and 112 of the City of Rangoon Municipal Act of 1922 entitled “Scavenging and Cleansing Acts”. This empowers YCDC to act on waste management within their jurisdiction and to adopt regulations and standards for the storage, collection, and disposal of solid waste. However, implementing rules and regulations have yet to be put in place, and the existing ones updated.

Policy Recommendations

Based on Aye’s study, the SWMP will be rendered effective if supported by policies in the form of legislation, regulations, and administrative orders issued by YCDC and the Mayor. The recommended policies and ordinances that need to be drawn are:

1. An ordinance to support the ecologically sound practices on SWM such as the requirement for

environmental impact assessment (EIA) for the industries and waste segregation programs for residential, commercial, and other establishments;

2. An ordinance to support the collection of waste management charges in the form of direct-user charges (which depend on volume of waste generated) and monthly charges from households, institutions, commercial establishments, and industries;
3. An anti-littering ordinance that penalizes illegal dumping of wastes.

Other recommendations toward an effective SWMS are:

- Active community involvement and participation through appropriate information dissemination and knowledge proliferation on proper SWM;
- Waste minimization;
- Efficient and effective solid waste collection and transportation system; and
- Effective cost recovery program essential in developing waste management practices. (*Marie Fjel I. Maranan*)

¹ Seinn Lei Aye, PhD. Strategic Solid Waste Management Planning for Yangon City, Myanmar. University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB). December 2005.