



WOMEN IN WASTE MANAGEMENT

Four women recount the challenges of starting a solid waste management program in their community
by Gertrudes C. Samson

Every other day from 7am to 11am, four women wearing white long-sleeved shirts and buri hats push a cart around a community in Tanza Navotas, collecting segregated waste, sweeping litter, and reminding the people about the policies for solid waste management in the area.

They are Wenifreda “Nanay Weyne” C. Arabes, 60, Fedelina “Nanay Lyn” Pales, 57, Violeta “Ate Violy” O. Balse, 49, and Lanie “Jeng-Jeng” Eleoterio, 26. Together they compose the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Committee of the Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Maralita ng Navotas (SANAGMANA), a community-based organization in Tanza, Navotas. Nanay Weyne heads the SWM committee.

LIFE WITHOUT WASTE MANAGEMENT

Before transferring to the SANAGMANA community in Tanza, the four women lived in informal settlements in UE-Letre, Malabon, Metro Manila.

According to them, the situation in UE-Letre was really bad because majority of the people just dumped their mixed solid waste into a nearby creek. The garbage trucks then just occasionally dredged the waste in the creek. And because the

creek was polluted, the air smelled very bad, and there were lots of mosquitoes and flies. Nanay Lyn says that often, many people got sick especially the children and elderly.

Jeng-Jeng recalls, “*Ang babay namin noon malapit sa creek. Kapag umuulan bumababa hanggang sa sabig ng babay kasama ang mga basura. Ang hirap talaga*”. (Our former house there was near the creek. During rainy season, the water would rise up to the floor level of the houses, together with all the waste people dumped on the creek. It was really difficult).

Ate Violy adds, “*Walang nag-iikot doon para bumili ng recyclables at malayo din kami sa junkshop. Kaya kami na nagpapakolekta ng basura sa truck, balo-balo pa rin ang basura.*” (Nobody went around to buy recyclables and the junk shop was far. So the trash that the garbage truck picked up was still unsegregated).

According to Nanay Weyne, they didn’t have any program or orientation on solid waste management. She says, “*Nadinig ko lang sabi ng barangay kailangan daw maghiwalay ng basura, pero walang programa o oryentasyon. Wala ding tumitingin doon kung ginawa ba ng mga tao.*” (I just heard that the barangay (village) leaders said

we needed to segregate waste, but there was no program or orientation. Nobody checked if the people were doing it).

A CLEANER COMMUNITY

Compared with their former community in UE-Letre, their present condition now in SANAGMANA is a lot better. Nanay Weyne says that the environment is cleaner and the air is fresher compared to where they came from, and there are less mosquitoes and flies. Jeng-Jeng adds that they have not heard of anyone getting seriously sick, even the children.

Nanay Weyne attributes the better conditions to the solid waste management policies of the community. SANAGMANA has a comprehensive Deeds of Restriction which explicitly states that the members are required to follow RA 9003, or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, passed in 2001. RA 9003 requires households to segregate biodegradables from the non-biodegradables, and recover recyclable materials. If there are newcomers to the community, the SANAGMANA Council orients them on the policies of SWM.

SANAGMANA takes the challenge of solid waste management seriously because of the sensitive nature of the housing site—a reclaimed former fishpond surrounded by other fishponds. Waste management is a critical factor to prove the viability and of the project and sustainability of the environment. About 130 families are now living in the site, with more still coming.

WASTE COLLECTION

In January 2007, residents were required to sign up for committees to help in the management of the housing site. At first many people signed up for the SWM Committee. But when they learned that collecting waste was part of the responsibilities of the committee, the number dwindled, until only the four women were left.

The women started collecting segregated garbage around the community on February 2007. Aside from collecting the trash, the committee also imposes discipline on community members. If the garbage is mixed together, they do not collect it. They recount, *"Isang beses may pasaway na residente, pinakolekta sa amin ang isang sakong basura niya. Sa ibabaw mga recyclables pero sa ilalim pala halo-balong basura pati nabubulok. Binalikan namin talaga siya, sabi namin buwag na niyang uulitin yon, kung bindi, hindi na talaga namin siya kokolektahan sa susunod."* (One time, there was a stubborn resident who asked us to collect his sack of waste. At the top were the recyclable materials but below we discovered it was a mixture of wastes including biodegradables. So we went back to that person and told him not to do it again, otherwise we will not collect their waste anymore).

Through the committee's efforts, majority of the residents are already segregating their waste. Some bury their biodegradable waste in small pots, using the resulting compost as fertilizer for their plants. The people are now also cleaning their surroundings. Children also participate by segregating the recyclable waste at home to sell to the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) of the community.

CHALLENGES

In the beginning reminding people about SWM policies was not easy. The women recall, *"Noong simula pa lang, minsan yong tingin ng iba parang nagsabing, 'Anong karapatan nila para pagsabihan kami?'"* Pero napansin namin, nang magkaroon na kami ng uniform parang nagkaroon na kami na awtoridad, kinikilala na nila kami. Ngayon kapag makita pa lang nila kaming padating na naka uniporme, naglilinis na ang mga tao ng paligid. Nilalabas na nila ang mga bukod-bukod na basura kabiti bindi pa kami nagsasalita." (When we were just starting, sometimes some people just stared at us as if thinking: 'What authority do they have to remind us?.' But we noticed, when we already had a uniform,

it gave us some sense of authority. People now recognize us. Nowadays when they see us coming in uniform, people start to clean up their surroundings. They bring out their segregated waste even if we don't tell them to).

Another challenge faced by the committee is balancing their time for the committee work and their livelihood or income generating activities which are also important for their family's survival. So in May 2007, the SWM Committee organized the community into blocks, with each block choosing a leader who will help the SWM Committee in the monitoring and implementation of SWM policies. The block leaders chosen were also all women. According to the SWM Committee, the work is also open to men, but most men are always busy earning a living for the family outside the community throughout the day.

FUTURE STEPS

The four women believe that 100 percent success in implementation of a solid waste management program is possible. They consider the challenges to its implementation as no longer obstacles but just temporary hurdles to overcome towards its full implementation.

First, they feel that they need to be persistent in reminding the community members on the gains of practicing SWM; and the corresponding penalties of violating the policies (for example, dumping of waste in water bodies is a criminal offense in RA 9003). For this, they are planning to maximize the use of the existing SANAGMANA paging system (a sound system with microphone and speaker which is heard in the whole community) to constantly remind people.

Second, they believe that parents should learn to discipline young children. Nanay Weyne says, *"Yung mga magulang kailangan din talaga nilang pagsabihan ang kanilang mga anak na buwag magkalat sa paligid. Yung mga kalat kasi na winawalis namin, halos mga pinaglagyan ng kendi at sirsirya. Sino pa ba ang dapat magsabi sa mga anak kundi mga magulang?"* (Parents need to tell their children not to litter, Majority of the waste we sweep around the community are candy wrappers and junk food packaging. Who else should tell the children but the parents?).



WEYNE ARABES AND VIOLY BALSE COLLECT BIO-DEGRADABLE WASTE



THE AUTHOR (FAR RIGHT) WITH THE SWM COMMITTEE

When the four of them were asked why they decided to volunteer in the SWM committee, they said, *"Naniniwala kasi kami na mahalaga ito. Para sa kabutihan din naming labat ito. Gusto kasi namin ng malinis na paligid, dahil mas mabuti ito. At siyempre kung gusto mo ng malinis na paligid tumulong ka dapat na pangasiwaan ito."* (We believe it is important. This is also for our own good. We want a clean environment because it is better. And of course, if you want a clean environment you must help in managing it). ■