

POLOMOLOK COMBATS ITS WASTE PROBLEM WITH PRIVATE SECTOR AND BARANGAY LGU SUPPORT

Polomolok (from the B'laan term “Flomlok” which means “hunting ground”), a first class municipality in South Cotabato province, is an agricultural town of more than 130,000 people. It is located 17 kilometers from General Santos City. Being in a typhoon-free area, Polomolok’s weather and climatic conditions favor the production of all kinds of agricultural products throughout the year.

The most common crops produced in Polomolok are pineapple, asparagus, papaya, cassava, banana, corn, rice, mango, durian, and cut flowers. Almost three-fourths of the land area (total land area: about 34,000 ha) are planted with these crops. Fresh and processed pineapples are being exported to other countries in the world, while asparagus and cut flowers are exported fresh to Japan and Europe.

Polomolok’s strategic location and good climate have enticed multi-national companies like Dole Philippines, Inc. (DolePhil) to invest heavily in agribusiness in the area. DolePhil has put up in Polomolok its largest pineapple cannery in the country. As economic opportunities in Polomolok

increase with the development of its commercial and industrial sector, so does its population, which is rising primarily because of in-migration. With a growing population comes, as expected, a growing waste problem.

Polomolok is confronting the garbage issue head on, and it is definitely winning the war on waste. Polomolok did it with the help of various sectors, especially its barangay LGUs and the private sector.

WAR VS. WASTE: VARIOUS SECTORS WORK TOGETHER

With its current population, Polomolok generates more than 46,000 kilograms of waste daily. Seventy-two percent of this is biodegradable, and the rest are recyclables, special waste and residual waste. A substantial volume of these solid waste would find its way to the Silway River, the biggest of the four rivers that traverse the



Above: Keeping the town clean is a serious concern for Polomolok residents. Left: The municipal hall.



Top: Polomolok enforces “no segregation, no collection” policy. Right: A number of street sweepers, assisted by stallholders themselves, help keep the market clean.



municipality, which empties into Sarangani Bay, a key marine biodiversity area. The waste problem in Polomolok thus threaten not only its people’s health but also the health of Sarangani Bay, if nothing would be done soon.

The municipality acted soon enough. Guided by the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (RA 9003), Polomolok started its own solid waste management (SWM) program, carrying out some activities on waste segregation and composting as it prepared its 10-year Integrated SWM Plan, with technical assistance from USAID’s Philippine Environmental Governance (EcoGov) Project, implemented with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). When the plan was approved by the local council in early 2007, Polomolok shifted its SWM program to high gear.

With two units of garbage compactor and one dump truck, separate collection for residual and compostable waste was implemented as Polomolok enforced a “no segregation no collection” policy.

At the market where residents of nearby towns shop for their supplies of food and other consumer products, market cleaners were assigned to clean

the area. Barangay Captains of both Barangays Cannery and Poblacion readied their puroks for unannounced inspections.

Schools also cooperated. Principals, teachers and students see to it that their school premises are generally clean. Establishments and multinational companies donated garbage receptacles as a gesture of their support to the program. Some put up their own composting facility for their biodegradable waste.

One needs only to go around and see for himself the changes that have taken place. The highway; the inner streets; the park and plazas as well as bus terminal — where 100 percent waste segregation is enforced — and the public market, perhaps the largest in South Cotabato with 600 regular stallholders and about 500 ambulant vendors during market days, are all clean.

“Political will did make a lot of difference in our war against waste,” said Eric Leonardo, Polomolok’s SWM coordinator. Polomolok Mayor Isidro Lumayag, Leonardo said, fully supported the municipality’s SWM program. In 2008, for example, Polomolok invested close to P8 million for various SWM program implementation activities. “We also got a lot of help, especially from the private sector,” Leonardo said.

POLOMOLOK PARTNERS WITH DOLEPHIL IN CONSTRUCTING SANITARY LANDFILL

Aside from having development-minded leaders who have the political will to better manage its waste, Polomolok had a willing private sector partner in the construction of the first SLF in the province of South Cotabato.

Early this year, the five-hectare facility which is located within the DolePhil area was inaugurated with DolePhil Managing Director Kevin Davies and South Cotabato SK President Jinky Avance as guests of honor. The first cell was built by Polomolok at a cost of close to P3 million.



Top to bottom: SLF signage; some of the trash bins donated by Dole; guests during the launching ceremony check out the SLF.

“This clearly shows that it is very possible for municipalities to construct SLFs and manage their waste more effectively if they put their minds to it, and if they get the active participation of other sectors, especially private business,” said Ramon Ponce de Leon, South Cotabato Provincial Environment Management Officer. “Local governments need not carry the whole burden of managing their waste. The task becomes less difficult if other sectors are involved.”

As a complementary program to the SLF, a nine-hectare municipal composting facility located in Barangay Silway and designed to do massive production of compost, was also inaugurated this year. The composting facility, managed by Polomolok’s agriculture’s office, processes the town’s huge biodegradable waste into compost, employing vermi and trichoderma composting. It is also designed for large-scale vermi-culture. Compost produced is expected to be distributed to the 23 barangays, industries, farmers and schools for their gardens and farms as Polomolok heavily promotes organic farming.

The SLF will accommodate only residual waste, which is about 10 tons of the town’s 46 tons of waste generated everyday. In addition to the SLF, the facility houses an admin building and a material recovery facility.

In addition to providing the site, DolePhil provided P100,000 for the construction of the perimeter fence and more than 4,000 liters of fuel for the trucks and heavy equipment used during the construction of the facility. The company is also providing the municipality P1,000 per week for fuel during the SLF operation. As an active partner of the local government in waste management, DolePhil has donated trash bins to Polomolok. A day after the launching, the firm turned over an additional 50 trash bins to the municipality.



Left: the 9-ha central composting facility. Below: The municipal nursery, a recipient of compost produced from the facility.



BARANGAY LGUs ARE ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN SWM

While private sector participation is noteworthy, the roles of barangay LGUs cannot be underestimated. The participation of the three urban barangays LGUs has actually been remarkable. Barangay Cannery Site, which has been providing waste collection service since 1998, intensified its waste collection activities. Barangays Poblacion and Magsaysay have willingly assumed waste collection responsibilities. Costs spent for waste collection activities are shouldered by these urban barangays, with Barangay Cannery Site receiving fuel assistance from DolePhil of 30 liters/day.

During the SLF launching ceremonies, the municipality signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the three urban barangays. The agreement calls for the urban barangays to come-up with their Barangay ISWM Plans consistent with the Municipal ISWM Plan. Through the MOA, the



Barangay captains sign a MOA with Polomolok allowing them to collect fees from households and business establishments outside of the central business district.

3 barangays, also committed to sustain the segregated collection of biodegradable and residual wastes within their jurisdictions, and the delivery of these to the municipal composting facility and SLF, respectively. To support their activities, barangays have been allowed to collect garbage fees from households and business establishments catered by their waste collection services. Similar agreements are expected to be signed with the other 20 barangays in the future.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Polomolok is bent on continuing its SWM program, and even strengthening it. In fact, the creation of the Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office that will supervise the program has been initiated. Polomolok and the urban barangays are in the process of coming up with a fee collection mechanism to recover the cost of their waste management services. The revenues that will be generated and their regular SWM budgets will be ring-fenced or kept in a special account and will be used exclusively to fund environmental activities.

The municipality is now also paying serious attention to wastewater concerns, also with EcoGov assistance. Construction of a P4.2 million wastewater treatment facility for the town's huge market is almost complete.

“We know that much of our waste goes to our rivers, ending up in Sarangani Bay.” Mayor Lumayag said. “We cannot afford to continue polluting our rivers and the bay. We have to do something.”

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