COMPOSTING - CLOSING THE LOOP AT HOME

A HOUSEHOLD HOME COMPOSTING PROGRAMME IN MAJLIS BANDARAYA PETALING JAYA (MBPJ)

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

3R       Reduce, Reuse and Recycle
CETDEM   Centre for Environment, Technology & Development, Malaysia
CHC@PJ   Community Initiative on Household Waste Composting in Petaling Jaya
CISC     Community Initiative Steering Committee
DANIDA   Danish International Development Assistance
FAQs     Frequently Asked Questions
FMG      Fund Management Group
GEC      Global Environment Centre
MHLG     Ministry of Housing and Local Government
LA21     Local Agenda 21
MBPJ     Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (Petaling Jaya City Council)
NGOs     Non-Governmental Organisations
RAs      Residents’ Associations
RE       Responsible Entity
SWM      Solid Waste Management
Foreword

Economic growth has brought forth many benefits to Malaysians. However, industrialisation, urbanisation and population growth have meant that pollution and waste generation have likewise increased. Malaysia has therefore, made efficient, cost-effective and sustainable solid waste management an explicit goal to be met by 2020 in order to safeguard public health and the environment as well as to enhance the overall quality of life for citizens. Hence, effective solid waste management has become a critical challenge for the federal as well as local governments.

While landfills are the primary means to dispose of waste, such approach constitutes a waste of resources and imposes negative impact on the environment, contributing to global warming and causing discharge of pollutants to the environment. Furthermore, the financial burden for collecting and disposing of waste is also becoming increasingly challenging for Local Authorities like us.

Reducing waste at the source is an important method for conserving the environment, prolonging the lifespan of landfill sites and reducing costs. While the Federal Government is already making efforts to improve the handling of waste, the onus for reducing the amount of waste at source still lies with the local communities to take action and engage in alternative and sustainable means for effective solid waste management.

Of the 19,000 tonnes of municipal solid waste generated daily in Malaysia, around half is food wastes which are usually disposed of at landfill sites.

Composting at source, i.e. home is a way to reduce waste going to the landfill while producing environmental-friendly compost for garden or even organic farming. Home composting can reduce costs for waste management by reducing the amount of waste that needs to be transported and disposed to landfills. Furthermore, home composting is an important means to conserve valuable organic resources by returning organic matter and nutrients to the soil, thus improving the growth of trees and plants.

I am proud to share with you a household home composting programme which was carried out in Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya over 18 months period between June 2008 to November 2009. The project is one of ten community initiatives carried out by Local Authorities around Peninsular Malaysia, funded by the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) Solid Waste Management Community Initiatives Fund in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG).

I wish to record our sincere gratitude to MHLG as well as DANIDA for their support to our initiatives. It is my hope that such initiatives will be replicated to more areas in Petaling Jaya and hopefully, also other areas throughout Malaysia.

Dato’ Mohamad Roslan Sakiman
Mayor
PETALING JAYA CITY COUNCIL, SELANGOR
Message

Public participation and awareness are instrumental for improving the way we deal with our waste today. Waste reduction and recycling can only be successful if the authorities, the private sector and the public work together in unity for the better of the society.

In 2005, the Government of Denmark through the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) has agreed with the Government of Malaysia to establish a fund to support Local Authorities who were committed to carry out such initiatives to increase public participation and awareness in solid waste management at the local level.

The fund was subsequently established in 2006 and the Local Authorities were requested to submit proposals for funding. The response from the Local Authorities was overwhelming and very encouraging. It was not easy for the Ministry and DANIDA to select the 10 initiatives among the large number of interesting and promising ideas which could be financed within the budgetary limits. The strong response is a clear demonstration of the commitment and enthusiasm towards saving resources and protecting the environment that exists in many Local Authorities and communities.

The initiatives selected include a very broad range of activities involving many parts of the society including residents, school children, hotels, restaurants, hawkers, tourists, just to mention a few. Meanwhile, the ranges of subjects are similarly broad including waste reduction, recycling, home composting, bulky waste management and cleanliness.

The fund has now come to an end and it is time to sum up the experience and the lessons learnt. Through a series of booklets, each initiative is presented and the experience and lessons learnt are documented.

It is my hope that the booklets will act as a source of inspiration for others. The booklets are made not only to facilitate replication of the initiatives but is also hoped that the booklets will inspire residents, communities and businesses to come up with different and new ideas to further increase the involvement of the society and the hope for a brighter future for all of us.

The present booklet presents one of the successful community initiatives – A household home composting project in Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ).

DATO’ NADZRI BIN YAHAYA, Ph.D
Director General
Department of National Solid Waste Management
Ministry of Housing and Local Government
Background

Petaling Jaya City Council or Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya (MBPJ), with over half a million inhabitants is situated in the heart of Malaysia in the State of Selangor. MBPJ has been a pioneer in the implementation of Local Agenda 21 (LA21) which strives to engage local communities in environmental, economic and social issues through a bottom-up process. This entails partnerships among different stakeholders including the government, the private sector, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the local communities, etc.

Activities spearheaded by MBPJ so far include greenery projects, recycling, crime prevention, river rehabilitation, social cohesion projects, sport and youth activities and capacity-building sessions among any others. Household home composting is therefore, a natural progression of the LA21 programmes of MBPJ.

In February 2007, MBPJ applied to the Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA) Solid Waste Management (SWM) Community Initiatives Fund for support to a household home composting programme and received a grant of RM 120,000 for the programme. The project is part of the Solid Waste Community Initiatives Programme initiated by the Department of National Solid Waste Management, Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) and DANIDA. The programme supports solid waste related community initiatives in 10 Local Authorities (LAs) around Peninsular Malaysia, targeting public participation as an inherent element of an improved SWM system.

This booklet documents the processes and activities carried out under the household home composting programme in Petaling Jaya. The programme was designed for 50 households from different geographical and demographical backgrounds to carry out home composting on a voluntary basis for producing compost that can be used as soil conditioner and at the same time reduce the amount of waste to be disposed of.

The objectives of the community initiative in household composting were:
1. To introduce household home composting as a means of reducing waste at source; and
2. To partner with different stakeholders in promoting household waste composting.

The programme was carried out from June 2008 to December 2009.
Composting at Home

A few of us give it a thought how much waste we generate when preparing food (or cleaning our dishes for leftovers). Most of us just throw it in a bag and place it outside our house to let the waste collectors take care of it.

There are, however, many arguments for re-thinking:

- Food waste dumped at landfills contributes to the pollution of water and produces greenhouse gases, contributing to global warming.
- It is costly to transport our waste all the way to the nearest landfill and to manage it at the landfill.
- Food waste is an important resource that our soil needs to remain fertile and suitable for plants to grow.

Home composting is something we all can do, right from our home!

WHAT IS HOME COMPOSTING?

Home composting is a small-scale process where food waste and garden waste generated from our daily activities are degraded biologically to become a valuable compost material. A significant waste reduction at source can be achieved and the compost produced can be utilised in our gardens and green areas.
Home Composting

1. Purchase of food from market/supermarket
2. Processing and consumption of food
3. Source - separation of food waste in small bucket (kitchen)
4. Placement of food waste into compost bin in garden
5. Composting with regular turning (every 2 weeks)
6. Recovery of compost and returning to garden

Many home composting programmes only include vegetable waste and garden waste as the potential nuisances such as smell, attraction of rats, etc. is easier to control for this type of waste. However, the ambition of this programme was to maximise the compost production and therefore, all food waste together with waste from animals are included.

In the project, all organic food waste is included in the home composting programme, including:

- Food peels and off-cuts
- Rejected or expired fruits and vegetables
- Food residues from meals
- Flowers from the house
- Plants, leaves and twigs from the garden
- Small branches from the garden

Each participating household was provided with a small bucket with a cover. The bucket functioned as a temporary storage for the food waste in the kitchen until transfer to the compost bin.

Each household was equipped with 2 composting bins. The bins were modified standard 60-litre plastic dustbins from where the base was removed. Holes were drilled on the side and on lid of the bin to allow oxygen to enter and humidity to escape. It was assumed that it would require 1 month for filling the first bin, after which it would take approximately 2 to 3 months to fully compost.
Depending on the size of the family, it did indeed take about a month or so for the first bin to be filled. When the first bin was full, the heap was transferred to a second bin while the first bin could then be used for filing with kitchen organic waste yet again. 2 weeks later, composted waste from the second bin was transferred to plastic bag for maturation.

The compost heap stored in the plastic bag was turned every fortnight to improve the mixing of the food waste as well as to improve aeration to facilitate the composting process.

2 bags of soil and small containers with enzymes were also provided to the participants. The soil was used as material for layering in the composting bin, especially when high protein waste, e.g. meat, was added. The enzymes were added to the compost (if deemed necessary) to increase the temperature and aid in the breakdown process. When required, 1 tablespoon of enzyme was added to the compost weekly or monthly.

Depending on the amount of high-protein food waste (meat and so forth) being entered into the composting bin, appropriate amount of green waste (landscape trimmings such as leaves, fresh twigs) containing carbon was added into the compost bin to ensure a balanced nutrient mixture, essential for a proper composting process.

The participating families were requested to keep a record of their total waste generation for the first month of the project in a record booklet. This formed the baseline data to monitor the changes in the volume of domestic waste disposed of per household after introducing home composting.

The families were requested to use the compost bin which is yet to be used for the purpose. All the waste, including organic waste was put into the bin and the level of filling was measured. The process was continued after the composting started to estimate the level of reduction in waste amounts. A Household Waste Composting booklet comprising of a pictorial guide on how to make compost was also distributed.
Stakeholder Involvement – The Key to Success

Without the engagement and enthusiasm of the various stakeholders, the chances that a community initiative will sustain in the long-run are minimal. To continue keeping the stakeholders actively involved, it is crucial that activities are properly coordinated, that information are properly communicated, the required technical expertise are available and there are proper avenues for discussing and solving possible challenges.

The household composting project would not have been possible without the dedication of the following bodies and stakeholders:

THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVE STEERING COMMITTEE (CISC)
A stakeholder meeting organised by MBPJ was held on the 31st May 2007 in Menara MBPJ to discuss and plan for the Household Waste Home Composting Programme. A Community Initiative Steering Committee (CISC) was established at the meeting to implement and monitor the project. CISC comprised of representatives from MBPJ, Centre for Environment, Technology and Development, Malaysia (CETDEM), other NGOs such as Global Environment Centre (GEC) and a number of Residents’ Associations in PJ.

The chairman of the Environmental Working Committee of LA21, Petaling Jaya was appointed the chairman of the committee. This decision facilitated the coordination with other LA21 initiatives of the Council. In addition, the quarterly progress reports were submitted to the MBPJ Sustainable Development Standing Committee, chaired by the Mayor.

The roles of CISC were to:
1. Make decisions on project implementation;
2. Decide on monitoring system for the initiative and monitor the progress;
3. Endorse quarterly progress reports and final report prepared by the Responsible Entity (RE) (CETDEM) prior to submission to the Fund Management Group (FMG); and
4. Resolve any operational issues brought up for the committee.

CETDEM was appointed the RE for the project by the CISC. As the RE, CETDEM was responsible for the daily implementation of the project and reporting to CISC.
An overview of the principal stakeholders in the household home composting programme is listed below.

**MBPJ**
- Chairs CISC
- Steers the implementation of the program
- Monitors progress of the project

**CETDEM**
- Acts as the secretariat to CISC
- Acts as the RE for the community initiative
- Provides technical know-how on composting
- Recruits participants for the kitchen composting project
- Provides training on kitchen composting to the participants
- Monitors implementation and progress made by participants
- Reports progress of the community initiative to CISC
- Prepares quarterly reports on the community initiative for submission to CISC

**RESIDENTS’ ASSOCIATIONS IN PETALING JAYA**
Residents’ Associations (RAs) represent the respective neighbourhoods and play an important role in enhancing the quality of life for fellow residents. Among the roles played by RAs are as follow:
- Encourages and recruits participation from residents; and
- Promotes the program at the neighbourhood level.
Engaging Participation - The Approach

As a first step to gain attention from residents to the initiative, a Community Household Composting Participation Brochure was prepared by CETDEM to introduce the initiative and invite interested families to participate. The brochure was distributed to interested residents by the involved RAs.

A signing ceremony between the DANIDA Community Initiatives Fund, MBPJ and CETDEM was held at Menara MBPJ on 28th May 2008. Interested residents were invited to the event by the involved RAs and the Community Household Composting Participation Brochure was distributed among them during the ceremony.

The event attracted the presence of media and thus, served as a kick-off promotion event for the programme.

Apart from the signing ceremony, RAs were mobilised to encourage participation in the project, among others by distributing the Community Household Composting Application Form (to the families). Personal contacts from CETDEM and MBPJ were another avenue to attract participation in the programme.

Enrolment was entirely voluntary. A 3 months’ time period was allocated for the engagement of families in order to harness the target of at least 50 households for the project to commence. One reason for such long period was to allow sufficient time for CETDEM to present the required commitment for each individual applicant.

CETDEM conducted interviews with each individual member of the households applying to participate. They were briefed on the commitment needed for successful home composting to give an idea of what was expected of them to make the community initiative a success. When families were approved as participants, they were encouraged to recruit other participants.

The criteria for selection of families also included availability of garden space, the size of the households and whether or not the family cooks at home. Single-person households that do not cook at home were expected to generate very minimum food waste and were thus, not encouraged to participate in this programme.

When participants were accepted, they would receive free composting materials and equipment as well as free technical guidance and advice from CETDEM.

A total of 72 interested households were accepted for the programme during the recruitment process. 19 of these households withdrew/disqualified before the commencement of the programme so a total of 53 households (74% of the accepted households) entered into the actual home composting.
Composting methods and monitoring of the composting process were demonstrated at the sessions and detailed information about the types of waste to be composted was given. This information was also disseminated through the household waste composting booklet mentioned above.
Reviewing and Monitoring

To monitor the progress and maintain motivation among the participants, CETDEM arranged appointments with the participants for home visits. These usually fell outside office hours and sometimes on weekends if participants were working late during the weekdays. The home-visits allowed CETDEM to provide advice on the progress of the composting and to demonstrate how to turn the compost heap when it was due.

REVIEW SESSIONS

The participants were further invited for review sessions with a 4-6 weeks’ interval to reflect on procedure, discuss practices and identify challenges that some participants may have faced. The sessions provided a forum wherein participants could share their experiences as well as provide their ideas and solutions amongst themselves.

The first review session (half day), attended by 36 participants, was held at EcoGreen Restaurant (TTDI) on 14th December 2008, 3 months after the composting demonstrations.

A second review session (half day), attended by 33 participants, was held at CETDEM Organic Farming Community Centre on 16th May 2009 and a final review session (half day), attended by 35 participants was held in September 2009.

A post-project survey (through questionnaire) was carried out during the third review meeting to gauge the opinion and experiences gained by the participants in the household composting.

"An outcome of participating in the project was that the neighbours bonded. The neighbours supply me with kitchen waste. I gained new friends."

Chew Swee Sian

These review sessions were found to be extremely useful for the participants, not only by creating an avenue for sharing their experience but also by creating a social bonding between the residents!
Promotion and Outreach

A number of the publications and activities also aimed at communicating the project and experience to the wider public such as:

• Community Household Composting recruiting flyer
• Household Waste Composting Booklet
• Signing ceremony and media briefing

“The Local Government should publish more about composting. A lot of people actually do not know about it.”

Chew Swee Sian

MEDIA RELATIONS

Apart from the signing ceremony described above, a media briefing was held at the Menara MBPJ on 23rd January 2009. The objective of inviting the media was to disseminate the project activities and experience to the wider public. The briefing was attended by more than 40 participants. At the briefing, some of the participants shared their experiences with members of the press as well as with leaders from various RAs in Petaling Jaya.

CLOSING CEREMONY

The closing ceremony was held on 14th November 2009. At the event, all the participants received due recognition for their efforts. The event was covered by the major press/Bernama TV.

• Token of appreciation given at the closing ceremony
  (Source: The Star, 19 November 2009)
Results and Findings

PARTICIPATION

From the start of the programme, 53 households participated in the home composting programme. By the end of the project, i.e. November 2009, a total of 46 households still continued to compost. The drop-out rate of 13% (7 participants) can be considered quite low, considering that participation is voluntary and that the composting activities consumed considerable amounts of time and efforts from the participants.

As can be expected, the results of the composting differed among the participants. While some managed to compost successfully, some participants experienced problems such as offensive odour and presence of flies and maggots. This was mostly because they did not fully follow the instructions given by CETDEM and the care required to ensure proper composting. Another issue faced by some participants was the lack of dry and fresh green material which is necessary to maintain a well mixed composting heap. Most participants were not willing to gather these materials from outside their own compound. These problems, at one stage, almost stopped a few participants to continue. However, with quick intervention from CETDEM, these problems were eliminated.

Despite the mixed results, all participants have experienced benefits of composting. They are also happy with the organic compost produced by themselves for use in their garden. These findings were made evident at the review meetings and the post-project survey.

Some participants are confident enough to share and teach their friends the benefits of composting.
REDUCTION OF WASTE

As waste reduction was a main objective of the programme, the participants were required to monitor the reduction in the amount of waste for disposal, resulting from practising home composting. The monitoring was carried out, following the measurement procedures determined by CETDEM.

Most of the households recorded between 40-60% of reduction (by volume) in solid waste for disposal by practising home composting.

An average of 47% waste reduction was achieved by the 46 households that continued to compost until the end of the programme!

3 of the households even recorded up to 80% reduction in waste for disposal!

The successful reduction in waste for disposal and the production of free compost from their own waste became very strong reasons for these participants to support the programme and to influence others to do the same!
Lessons Learnt

RECRUITMENT

• Like for any recycling program, 100% participation can never be expected, especially when participation is purely voluntary. The number of invited participants must therefore, always be higher than the targeted number of participants. This programme targeted 50 households but 72 applications were originally accepted with the assumption that some would drop out or discontinue. Rightfully assumed, 19 households withdrew or failed to show up at the briefings. However, 53 households joined at the day of commencement which met the targeted number of 50 households.

• More households expressed interest in participating after the deadline for applications had passed. This indicates that participation could have continued to increase over time. For continuing home composting programmes, recruitment should therefore, preferably be open at any time.

• It was found that recruitment through the RAs was not very effective and generated low response. The distribution of the initial brochure by the associations did not seem to be effective. Follow-up and personal contacts were more useful approaches. Multiple avenues to approach the households are often required in order to harness enough participants.

• Recruitment of all family members in the same household could prove difficult at times. At the start of the community initiative, CETDEM attempted to convince family members of participants to be involved in the project as well or at least, to lend their support to the participants’ efforts. However, some family members of the participants were not too keen on the initiative, among others due to the potential for odour to develop and the proclivity for waste to attract flies.

FOLLOW-UP AND GUIDANCE

As some of the participants were very new to the idea of composting, close follow-up with advice and technical guidance were needed. House visits made by CETDEM, especially at the beginning, were found to be very important, particularly when flies and/or maggots appeared or when odour was detected from the composting bin.

Follow-up was done via phone call or home visits. Appointments for house visits had to take participants’ schedules into account so that the visits could be made when the participants were at home, often after office hours or on weekends for participants worked full-time. This proved to be very challenging and exceeded the resource estimation made by CETDEM.

The dependence on CETDEM by the participating households decreased as the project progressed. This showed that the guidance has been effective and after a while, the individual households could independently handle the composting at home.

“It would be very good if the authorities would think of awareness programs to try it out on a community basis. Get the people involved. It is a project where you can really see the outcomes.”

Gan Shu Mei
MOTIVATION THROUGH MEDIA
The signing ceremony and media briefing had encouraged the participants to remain motivated. The participants were encouraged by seeing the issues being highlighted in newspaper and some of them decided to assist CETDEM to encourage others to start home composting as well. In addition, the press briefing provided good exposure for the programme.

The programme could be further promoted during other relevant events such as Organic Day or World Environment Day. This is in line with feedback from most of the participants that there should be more publicity on the programme.

LEARNING THROUGH SHARING EXPERIENCES
The review sessions approved to be good opportunities for the participants to get together and share their individual experience in compost making. Many were relieved to realise that they were not the only ones facing the challenges they encountered when carrying out the composting.

Participants with good results shared their success stories and helped motivating those who were facing difficulties such as bad odour and proliferation of maggots and flies.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS?
It was found that getting committed participants for the community initiative was not easy. Despite the low cost of equipment such as composting bins, enzymes and soil, some participants’ willingness to practise composting was contingent upon free handout of the equipment.

Furthermore, some participants also stated that they faced difficulties in obtaining additional green materials such as grass clippings that had to be added in the compost bins to achieve the right texture. They were generally also hesitant to pick out garden waste that had been thrown out by neighbours.

Bad odour, mainly due to insufficient turning of compost was found to be the main problem.

“Before, I did not know how to do composting. We threw all in the rubbish bin - fruits and vegetables. Now, we have more healthy plants. We share the compost with neighbours and my family. Once you get a hang of composting, it is really not that difficult. You just throw it out once a day. We learnt more things from the composting project and we met friends.”

Lee Moi Yin
Contribution to Solid Waste Management Policy

The outcome from this project demonstrates that the programme can be replicated elsewhere to complement existing Reduce, Reuse and Recycle (3R) practices. MBPJ has noted the scale of waste reduction from the participating households as this is an indication of achievement for both the civic participation as well as the authorities.

In 2008, MBPJ produced approximately 145,000 tonnes of waste. With 50 households involved in a pilot programme, composting can reduce the waste amount into 25 tonnes. If this could be applied to 100,000 households, waste reduction would be as high as 50,000 tonnes! Furthermore, the amount of money spent on waste management could be considerably reduced. In 2009, RM 48 million was allocated for SWM in MBPJ alone!
Community Impact and Sustainability

The community initiative has proven to be sustainable as the participants have indicated that they will continue to practise household waste composting. Of the 53 participating households, 46 ‘graduated’ from the programme and continue composting after completion of the programme.

BUILDING LOCAL CHAMPIONS!
Participants also showed enthusiasm for getting more people involved in composting. 5 of the participants were also confident enough to act as trainers and assisted others in the composting process.

At the 3rd review session, most of the participants informed that they have managed to influence other families and individuals to start composting at home – even families in Singapore! Some participants started to disseminate their experiences to other organisations. For example, the Tzu Chi Buddhist Society (an active NGO) had been briefed about household waste composting by 2 of the participants.

Furthermore, some has started organic farming and shared their product with others while some has also started volunteering for CETDEM’s Organic Farming project. Participants also found that ties to neighbours and other participants were strengthened by sharing their experiences of the household composting project.

"I learnt to compost and got free fertilizer for my plants and vegetables. After I have started, 5 neighbours got inspired to join in the project."

"To compost, you do not need to invest much time. Once a while, I turn the compost. You tend to get to know more friends. You just enjoy it!"

"I think it is good if you continue this programme and raise more awareness. My neighbour did not know that composting is so easy. It also helps you to save money and the environment."

Thomas Chia Boon Hwa

Overall, this programme has proved to be a successful community-driven project. A strong working model involving the authorities (MBPJ), the NGOs (CETDEM) and the residents was formed during the implementation of the programme. Such initiatives, if expanded to all local communities in Malaysia, could potentially bring immense socio-environmental benefits to the country!