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A country struggling to solve the garbage problem

by Dr. (Mrs) Ajantha Perera

The huge mountain of garbage at Bloemendhal Road is a fascinating site for the researchers, yet a frightening experience to the common man. This was not my first sight of a garbage dump. The garbage dump of Meethotamulla took away all my fears to go to hell, as I believe that even hell cannot be any dirtier. Sri Lankans are good at keeping a problem and spend hours discussing as to what can be done about it, yet never or very rarely coming to solve the problem. The time has come for us to change those attitudes and truly contribute to make a difference.

Bio-degradable material

85% of our garbage is made up of bio-degradable material, i.e. if you throw it onto the soil it will decay within days. These materials can be composted at home or composted at large scale through the initiation of the local authority. Home composting is always the best, as this would reduce the load of garbage which needs to be carried by the local authorities on a daily basis.

Home composting is the responsibility of each citizen of Sri Lanka. It is not an option but rather a must. Composting can be done by a pit system, a turn over system (turning the pile at least twice a week) or a bin system.

The bin system provides an opportunity for the local authorities to make bins and sell it to the households at a reasonable rate.

If there are businessmen in the area who would like to make bins, then their assistance also should be accepted.

Recycling waste

The waste such as paper, glass and plastics can be recycled. The industries to recycle these have existed for years in this country, some more than 50 years. The Paper Corporation is said to be getting back to the recycling business very soon. If it truly happens as promised it would provide a large scale income to thousands of people who collect waste paper for recycling. In 1995 a program was launched to separate waste paper, glass and plastics at home and sell it to the Multi Purpose Cooperatives. This program is still functioning in some parts of the country. Another program was launched to collect the separated waste by the local authority from households. This too is still functioning in some parts of the country. If the garbage problem is to be solved these programs must have the support of the government as well as the people.

Public Nuisance Ordinance

The Public Nuisance Ordinance spells out very well that the provision is available to fine any person caught throwing garbage on to the roadside. A person found throwing garbage onto the roadside can be fined Rs. 50.00. This fine would be ideal if it can be implemented as a spot fine. The Public Health Inspectors are little reluctant to go to courts to fine a person Rs. 50. It was requested from all Ministers of Environment who came into power within the last 12 years to increase this fine upto Rs. 500. But upto now no satisfactory answer has been received. If any person in authority wishes to solve this ever growing garbage problem which is a key to spread

of dengue fever, then they must assist to implement this fine which has been in effect in Sri Lanka even in 1932.

Going abroad on garbage

Today the garbage problem has become an opportunity to many to travel abroad. Most persons who come to Sri Lanka with a proposal to solve the garbage problem also have a component to offer persons within the relevant authorities to travel to their country to see how the garbage problem has been solved. These opportunities are misused by those who travel abroad and very few positive outputs have come as a result of these visits to foreign countries.

To solve the problem - we can

We in Sri Lanka have all the knowledge to solve the garbage problem. What we lack is the enthusiasm and the commitment. Many people believe in doing a lot of charity works to show how much they care about the motherland. The greatest charity they could truly perform is to help solve this, the major environmental hazard in the country. If you truly love your mother nation, then compost at home, using your food waste, join in a recycling program for waste paper, glass and plastics. Buy wisely so that you do not bring home unnecessary garbage in the form of packing material, carry a cloth bag instead of a thin polythene shopping bag, support the Rs. 50 spot fine for those who throw garbage on the roadside.

Be different and make a difference.

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Dumping city garbage in the outskirts. Is this the solution to the problem?