

Garbage is opportunity in Pasay: how Cutcut Creek was saved



In Pasay City, garbage finds itself into the hands of entrepreneurs, rather than into the depths of waterways, just very recently. This is the story of how Cutcut Creek was saved from debris and pollution and how community behaviors changed.

The Cutcut Creek Clean-Up project is not a new activity. It was, in fact, a previous initiative assisted by an international development partner that failed. But DILG's Luisa Echavia intended to succeed. She knew that transformative leadership was required for communities to have a shared understanding of their complex issues and generate creative strategies.

City Director Echavia said that the Cutcut creek clean-up was a complex social mobilization activity led by DILG, as imposed by the Supreme Court. Garbage and waste from the barangays were being dumped into waterways. This has resulted to flooding and environmental degradation of Cutcut Creek that traverses Barangay 193 in Pasay City.

Nanganganak ang mga concerns, the lady city director said, pero lahat ng lumalabas na problema, we treat as opportunities.

The DILG and barangay leadership involved the community, particularly barangay officials, youth leaders and organizations, out-of-school residents, junkshop owners, and the City Solid Waste Management Office, in addressing the complex issue. A Barangay Ecological Solid Waste Management Committee was formed to deal with program implementation.

The first clean-up activity was a success. The community residents soaked their bodies wet to de-clog and clean the waterways. As a result of the initial collaboration in July 2011, about three tons of debris, 180 sacks of garbage, and 28 sacks of construction materials were fished out from Cutcut Creek.

Today, the clean-up drive is done twice a month by the barangay in partnership with the community and other stakeholders. Community awareness programs were also pursued to complement efforts to de-clog the creek. These included house-to-house visits, reminders for residents to do their share in community cleanliness, and putting up signages in strategic areas containing information on waste segregation and schedule of garbage collections for biodegradable and non-biodegradable materials.

The mounting volume of garbage collected from the community served as an opportunity to generate additional income for the barangay. An arrangement was made with a junk shop owner to collect the segregated trash that can still be recycled.

Bag-making from recycled plastic was also pursued. Local NGOs trained community members and provided seed money for starting small enterprises.



The barangay also requested for a daily garbage collection and an additional smaller garbage truck that can enter small alleys, which encouraged households to take their garbage out and not to throw them in waterways.

The change in community behaviors produced meaningful results.

The community did not experience severe flooding at the height of the tropical storms in 2012. It also had a positive effect on the health of the community, especially those living along the creek. In addition, community participation is more evident unlike before, when the only ones doing their share in maintaining the cleanliness of Cutcut Creek were the residents living beside the creek.

More than saving Cutcut Creek, however, the initiative changed the community first. Everyone contributed to the community problem then. Now, everyone is part of the solution.



The shift started with the mindset. We decided to focus more on the opportunity, rather than being sidelined and weakened by the magnitude of the challenge facing the community, CD Echavia stressed.

She explained: If we only see the garbage in the creek, then we will forever de-clog and remove the debris. We chose to look as well on what needed to be done with household garbage that might be thrown into the creek. And so we came up with income opportunities from garbage collection, segregation, recycling, and livelihood.

That was the first meaningful change—to frame the challenge of the community as an opportunity. This set off a different approach and a chain reaction of meaningful outcomes.