

CHAPTER 33

WASTE MANAGEMENT SERVICES IN BOTSWANA: Evolution of Problems, Perspectives and Responses

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Introduction

This chapter examines waste management services in Botswana. Since Botswana's Independence in 1966, until the early 80s, waste services received only lip service from the authorities.

The evolution of Botswana's waste management problems was characterised by the following aspects.

- ❑ No service was provided by the colonial administration;
- ❑ Lip service syndrome in the first years of independence;
- ❑ Lack or absence of service structures at both central and local levels for a long time;
- ❑ Perception of waste as a useless matter and only fit for disposal at far away places;
- ❑ Lack or deficiency of sufficient resources channelled into the service sector;
- ❑ Low ranking in priorities due to lack of political and higher administrative support;
- ❑ Lack of popular participation due to lack of official innovation vision;
- ❑ Absence of adequate legislative provision;
- ❑ Insensitivity to the Environment, in general, due to low environmental education; and
- ❑ Lack of training programmes to produce the required technical staff.

These problems gave rise to another cluster of problems, among them being:

- ❑ Unorganised services run by local authorities after inheriting virtually nothing from the central government(s);
- ❑ Wastes finding their way into ungazetted areas such as streams, dams, highways, pathways, fields and public spaces;

- ❑ Increasing volumes of wastes that could not be properly accommodated in the service system due to lack of vision; and
- ❑ Poor or lack of projection in waste production in response to changes in the political economy.

The eventual outcomes of the problems listed above continue to be experienced now and they include:

- ❑ There are now *a variety of waste streams to be dealt with* i.e. household, industrial, commercial, agricultural, institutional and gardens;
- ❑ *The amount of wastes now produced in the country and indeed other countries is fairly high*, requiring special programmes;
- ❑ *The disposal facilities are in deplorable conditions* because there was no initial environmentally friendly and sensitive planning due to lack of technical expertise; and
- ❑ There has been *lack of information compilation* on the service simply because of lack of sensitisation of the officers in charge.

One of the problems facing waste management is lack of a standard definition of waste that could appeal to the politicians, administrators, economists, technocrats and planners. As a result, the following *generalised scenario* presents itself:

- ❑ Politicians call for developments not knowing that they perhaps introduce various wastes;
- ❑ Economists cannot picture a situation where one wastes money on waste;
- ❑ Technocrats fail in their quest for a good service due to lack of support from the system; and
- ❑ Both physical and economic planners don't easily think of waste issues when they plan.

There appears to be no standard text book definition of 'WASTE'. Some sources define it as: *anything that has no value to anybody and only fit for discarding* (indicate source of definition). It should however, be that something can be valueless (have no value) to someone yet invaluable to another. It is in this spirit that the Chinese say that waste is something the value of which we have not yet assessed or appreciated (source). *The term waste is being used interchangeably with terms such as refuse, litter, garbage, trash, detritus, rubble, debris, dust, and useless matter. Many of these terms are subsets of waste.*

As the problems evolved and broadened, they encompassed everybody to the extent that a picture is shown of a hopeless situation. On the contrary, there have been steps taken to try and remedy the situation.

Intervention in Waste Problems in Botswana

In Botswana, the response has been in three main areas:

- Community sensitisation era;
- Refuse collection era; and
- An awakening era.

Community Sensitisation Era

The *Community Sensitisation Era* started in the early 1970s with the creation of Village Health Committees (VHC's) in 1973. This was the time when waste was addressed by the health personnel under what was then called Public Health, which is now called *Society Towards Community Health Principles*, especially in the areas of cleanliness. It was held strongly then that Cleanliness was next to Godliness. Even today the VHCs are still a force to reckon with in matters of waste management. The advantage with these committees is that they are part and parcel of the society whose attitude they want to change. They were and are still operating by making home visits in the village with the assistance of the family welfare educators.

Refuse Collection Era

The *Refuse Collection Era* brought in a concept of refuse collection whereby governmental officials urged people to collect waste and throw it far away. In the same era people were asked to dig pits in their homesteads and collect and dispose of the combustible waste in the same pits. There was no instruction on the non-combustible wastes. Consequently, the people used the pits for both wastes. This has created homesteads with many pits, making it problematic to build new huts or houses.

In the same era, Councils began the *refuse collection services* at a rudimentary level. There were disposal sites and only *dongas* and burrow pits could be used where found and where they were non-existent, waste was dumped indiscriminately in the field as long as it was "far away"; this idea was not taking care of the fact that far away is next to someone's home, cattle post, farm lands or development designated areas. This brought a chaotic situation in

the country.

In this era, waste service was done from a point of nuisance especially from the health point of view. Hence, it remained a service of collection more than a service of management. This was a traumatic era in the waste management chronology.

The Awakening Era

The Awakening Era started in the 1980s and continued into the late 1990s. In this era, the authorities experienced an unprecedented pressure from within and without. This pressure demanded some solution to the problems of waste. In fact, this was an exciting era and waste was seen by people as a problem from the health point of view. This era can easily be broken down in chronological sequences as follows:

- ❑ In the 1980s, there was mounting pressure from members of the community and the press. There were articles in the press that called for action from the authorities. Politicians, especially councillors, in selected local authorities started to sensitise the public and the council management imperative to do something on the control of wastes.
- ❑ In 1984, the government announced the *establishment of the Annual Keep Botswana Clean Day*. This day is tied to the World Environment Day. The latter falls on the 5th June and the former falls on the first Saturday after the 5th June. June was further declared the Environment month.
- ❑ In 1986, the government assembled a committee called *Interministerial Anti-Litter Sub-committee*. Its aim was *to co-ordinate waste collection services in the country and to advise council on new strategies to adopt to improve the service*. This committee worked since then until it organised the First International Waste Management Congress in 1993. Unfortunately, it has died a natural death due to other developments.
- ❑ In 1988, the government had to succumb to the ever *increasing calls for improvements and for the growing concern on the risks of ground water contamination due to the manner in which wastes were disposed*. There was made provision for logistics under LG 144 vote to buy refuse trucks and to fence refuse sites. At the same time, provision was made to develop landfill sites in urban areas.
- ❑ In 1989, there was started a *rigorous public campaign on waste management in the Central District*. This has proved successful and the programme is being replicated in other districts and towns. It involves cleanest competitions amongst villages and VHCs best choir

competitions. The programme has become so successful that there is no thinking of it being abandoned.

- ❑ In 1993, the First International Congress on Waste Management organised by the Anti Litter Committee took place. This congress attracted politicians, bureaucrats, technocrats as well as media personnel. It was at this congress that a resolution was made to the effect that *there should be a national policy on waste management*.
- ❑ During the same year (1993), the government *commissioned the first ever Waste Management Project*. The project was the first of its kind in Southern Africa. It was a joint venture between the Government of Botswana and the Federal Republic of Germany. The project was divided into two phases, one dealing with *data compilation plus some sensitisation work* and the other dealing with the *actual implementation* of some results from phase two. The end of these phases was scheduled for 1999.
- ❑ In 1995, there was the *Second International Waste Management Congress* which produced a 12 point blueprint in terms of recommendations and resolutions. These have since become point of reference in the project's operations.
- ❑ In 1996, the *government created a national waste management division to try and harness all waste management issues at both local and central levels in the government system*. In the same year, there was drafted the Waste Management Policy and Strategy. This document was still to undergo a lengthy consultation process. It was subsequently to be transformed into a Waste Management Act.
- ❑ In 1997, the *Third International Waste Management Congress* was scheduled for June, as part of the Environment Month.

During the span of time covering the two phases, a lot of work in community mobilisation was implemented. The outreach programme covered the parliamentarians in their caucus meetings, councillors in full council meetings, chiefs at *kgotla* meetings, communities at workshops and seminars. This has been given a boost through the production of waste videos. The project also introduced a good waste management hierarchy strategies which encouraged the participation of a wider cross section of the community since it was aimed at bringing about concepts of *reduction, refusal, reuse and recycling*. It is important to note that disposal method is part of this hierarchy. In Botswana, disposal of waste by landfill has been chosen as the appropriate method of final disposal. Standard national technical guidelines have already been made and are currently being used.

There was also organised *formal training* courses in waste management for staff in Councils who are engaged in the waste service. These courses produced the persons with the relevant skills and knowledge in waste management.

These chronological events are a good sign of response so far taken by the people of Botswana in an attempt to deal with waste management.

Conclusion

At the close of the 1990s Botswana was producing about 0.70 kg of waste per person per day. This automatically comes to 5,110 units of waste per year. The main problematic wastes continued to comprise cans, paper, plastic, scrap metal, used oil, clinical wastes and organic swill.