

# Cultural Practices and Waste Management: Bridging Tradition and Environmental Policy in the Philippines

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**Abstract** - Amid global environmental challenges, the Philippines stands at the intersection of tradition and innovation, striving to address pressing waste management issues. This paper explores how Filipino cultural heritage complements the implementation of Republic Act No. 9003, also known as the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000. This landmark legislation promotes sustainable practices through waste reduction, segregation, and recycling. By examining traditional practices, societal values, and contemporary waste management initiatives, this study highlights the synergy between cultural norms and environmental policy. The research offers insights into how Filipino communities leverage tradition to foster environmental stewardship, demonstrating how cultural practices can drive societal change and support sustainable development.

**Keywords** - Filipino Culture, Solid Waste Management, Environmental Policy, Republic Act 9003.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Global urbanization has profoundly impacted both social and environmental systems. As communities grow and evolve, these developments bring significant challenges, particularly for ecological sustainability. Among these pressing challenges, solid waste management has emerged as a critical issue, threatening public health, environmental integrity, and economic stability. The rapid expansion of populations, industries, and institutions has increased waste production, encompassing biodegradable, recyclable, residual, and special waste. Poor waste collection, treatment and disposal systems worsen the situation leading to the build-up of waste in the streets, water bodies and the natural habitats. The effects of these failures are pollution, habitat destruction, disease spreading and waste of resources. The poor waste management burden is disproportionately experienced by marginalized groups of people, which further increases poverty and social inequality. Lack of access to adequate waste disposal services positions vulnerable population at the risk of the ill effects of pollution which continues the circle of environmental destruction and social inequality.

Addressing these challenges requires an integrated approach that combines policy, technology, community engagement, and sustainable practices. This is through the betterment of the waste collection systems, as well as encouraging waste minimization, onsite segregation, and recycling. Enlightenment of the people and adoption of well-established regulatory measures are important to create responsible waste management. Collaboration between governments, businesses, civil society, and local communities plays a vital role in developing holistic strategies that balance economic, social, and environmental goals.

### A. The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000

In response to the growing waste management crisis, the Philippines enacted Republic Act No. 9003, also known as the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, on January 26, 2001. The focus of this legislation is on

community-based, sustainable waste disposal, whereby the traditional disposal practices are changed into those with a global sustainability objective. The major clauses in the law encourage waste management, sorting, recycling and disposable waste disposal using local programs. It requires set up of Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs) in communities to boost the recycling activity and promote the conservation of resources. Also, closed and rehabilitated open dumpsites would help reduce environmental degradation, as well as health risks. The law replaces uncontrolled dumpsites with sanitized landfills which have an engineered landfill and which is of high quality standards in as far as environmental concerns are concerned, to safely discard the residual waste.

Local government units (LGUs) are tasked with implementing solid waste management programs, including fee collection for waste services. Participation by the people is encouraged creating a sense of community ownership and responsibility. At the national level, the law provides the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) to get policy together and to monitor compliance. The adoption of Rules and Regulations (IRR) as stipulated in DENR Administrative Order No. 2001-34, give specifications on how the law was to be operationalized. Collectively, these structures make RA 9003 a complete instrument of promoting sustainable waste management in the Philippines.

### ***B. Philippine Culture and Environmental Stewardship***

Culture serves as the foundation of human civilization, shaping societal behaviors and practices. Cultural traditions are critical in contemporary development in the Philippines. The values, traditions and practices of Filipinos help them to be socially cohesive and lead community programs. Filipino culture focuses on a collective action and environmental harmony which is inherently in line with sustainable practices. The symbolic significance of bayanihan a spirit of community work is an example of the significance of collective responsibility, particularly in solving environmental problems. Through such values, the community-based initiatives towards waste management are established.

Everyday Filipino practices reflect resourcefulness and sustainability, including minimizing food waste, reusing household items, and repurposing clothing. One of the cultural norms is the delivery of used or excess goods to the needy relatives to ensure a decrease in the waste of materials. These activities are representative of a natural sensitivity to the conservation which can supplement official waste management plans. Local involvement in sustainable development can be seen to be effective in community-based programs funded by institutions such as World Bank. Filipino communities have been able to influence their environment through the projects that they have taken on water systems, school buildings, health centers and post-harvest facilities. These initiatives are a good demonstration on how the grassroots can be used to make a significant contribution towards national development and alleviating poverty.

The Ecological Solid Waste Management Act acknowledges inclusion of cultural values in ensuring sustainability. The law brings together the cultural practices with environmental stewardship by promoting the involvement of the local people and empowering communities. This alignment between tradition and policy fosters a holistic approach to waste management, rooted in local knowledge and values.

## **II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

This study aims to explore the intersection between Filipino cultural practices and the implementation of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (RA 9003). In particular, it aims to determine the role of traditional behaviors and social norms in the management strategies and performance of waste management. The research will provide valuable insights into the relationship between cultural practices and policy implementation, offering recommendations for improving environmental planning and community-based initiatives.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach focused on secondary data analysis through a systematic review and synthesis of existing information on Filipino cultural practices and the implementation of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (RA 9003). Ethical considerations are integral to the research process, ensuring the responsible use of data with proper attribution and adherence to intellectual property rights.

### **A. Data Gathering**

The research begins with an extensive literature review to identify and collect relevant qualitative and quantitative data from diverse sources. These sources include peer-reviewed academic articles, government and NGO reports, policy documents, and statistical databases.

### **B. Data Collection**

The gathered data will be compiled and organized systematically. Key steps in this phase involve:

- Extracting relevant information.
- Categorizing data into themes related to cultural practices and waste management strategies.
- Preparing the data for in-depth analysis.

### **C. Data Analysis**

A qualitative content analysis will be employed to interpret the collected data. This involves identifying patterns, themes, and relationships within the data to understand how traditional behaviors and societal norms influence waste management strategies. The analysis will also evaluate the effectiveness of RA 9003 within the context of these cultural factors.

### **D. Synthesis**

In the final stage, the findings will be synthesized to provide a holistic understanding of the gaps in the current implementation of RA 9003 and the role of Filipino cultural practices in shaping waste management strategies. This synthesis will inform recommendations for improved environmental planning and policy-making.

## **IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **A. Bayanihan**

The concept of bayanihan, which signifies unity and cooperation within a community, exemplifies traditional practices that can drive environmental conservation. It is a living tradition that motivates community-based programs and carries a sense of community which binds various groups in the Philippine archipelago. Rivera (2021) states that the bayanihan spirit is a major determinant of the success of the ecological programs resulting to extended, continuous segregation, recycling, and reduction of wastes. Through the incorporation of bayanihan in waste management, the community will be more engaged and the policies to address the environment will be more effective and culturally responsive.

Rivera (2021) also argues that framing bayanihan as a national value underscores its potential to contribute to national development goals, including environmental sustainability. The spirit of bayanihan can be used to create a more inclusive and participatory waste management that would bring traditional values and new ecological issues closer to each other. In Barangay Dap-Dap, Albay, the bayanihan spirit has been instrumental in sustaining the "Kalinisan sa Bagong Pilipinas Program," a government initiative promoting proper waste management.

The community's collective efforts have led to it being declared the best-practicing barangay in ecological waste management for seven consecutive years since 2017 (Features, 2024). This appreciation explains why bayanihan builds a culture of environmental sustainability, which demonstrates that individuals can do tremendous outcomes in conservation when they act as one. The story of the success of Barangay Dap-Dap can be used as an example to other communities showing that the cultural practice can contribute to the success of environmental policies. The bayanihan culture is also in line with the community-based strategy fronted by RA 9003 that urges local government units to organize residents in order to achieve effective management of wastes. The bayanihan spirit strengthens these committees, fostering collective efforts toward the act's goals.

### **B. Sachet Culture**

Enerva (2022) discusses the global plastic waste crisis exacerbated by the widespread use of sachets small packets containing single servings of products like shampoos, condiments, and detergents. Those sachets serve low-income customers of the developing nations, which is why they contribute to a serious amount of plastic waste, where many of them find their way to the natural environment. The culture of sachet in the Philippines has a strong connection with the socio-economic life of the nation. Low income levels force many individuals to

buy the things they need on the day-to-day basis in small amounts at low prices. Although the practice addresses the needs of the economy, it leads to the problem of plastic waste in the country (Patton, n.d.). In Manila and nationwide, sari-sari stores allow consumers to buy items in sachets rather than bulk, further increasing packaging waste.

Bacolod City's "Wala Usik" store exemplifies how traditional practices can adapt to modern environmental challenges. This shop will also influence the culture to shift towards sustainable consumption by allowing customers to bring their own containers and purchase only what they require to use. This project is in line with the rising trend in the world to cut down on single use plastics and promote zero waste lives. Corporate programs, such as the Sachet Recovery Program that was conducted by Unilever, represent the way in which companies can respond to the environmental issues. In this program, sachets used are collected to be repurposed into materials to be used by the community such as school desk conversion of sachet waste.

This can be considered a sign of corporate responsibility and innovation, which fits the aspect of resource conservation and recovery, as afforded by RA 9003. Equally, the recycling plant of Nestle in Paranaque City concentrates on recycling after consumption laminates that are utilized in the manufacture of sachets, which will lead to a circular economy. These company programs demonstrate how companies could be at the front in providing solutions to waste management and at the same time meet the requirements of the environment. The correlation between corporate activities and RA 9003 is not only capable of solving the problem of sachet waste but also introduce a change of culture to sustainability and resourcefulness. This partnership benefits the environment by reducing pollution and conserving natural resources while creating economic opportunities for Filipinos.

### ***C. Sari-Sari Store***

Sari-sari stores are cultural institutions in the Philippines, providing a variety of goods in single- use packaging to cater to community needs. However, Acanto (2016) points out that they play a substantial role in the solid waste production, and plastic bags are the main way of storing waste. The fact that the sari-sari store owners have not adopted waste management practices means that the ideals of RA 9003 have not been fully applied in such businesses. In order to reconcile the convenience of sari-sari stores with the environmental objectives of RA 9003, the sari-sari stores can determine the behavior of the consumer by applying the principles of the act in their practices. By showcasing how small changes can contribute to larger environmental goals, sari-sari stores can catalyze community-wide participation in sustainable waste management practices.

### ***D. Bayong***

Bayong and "palengke bags" are traditional Filipino items used as sustainable alternatives to single-use plastic bags. These are handwoven bags done in local materials making it a strong and useful handbag symbolizing the rich culture of the Philippines. The use of bayong can be promoted and this will go a long way towards cutting plastic use and also aid local artisans. Patadlas and Mangila (2020) evaluate the program Balik Basket at Bayong para sa Kinaiyahan as one of the effective mechanisms of minimizing solid waste as the waste management problem has increased heavily due to the fast population increase. Their research indicates that the use of bayong can significantly mitigate plastic waste, aligning with RA 9003's environmental goals.

### ***E. Pagmamalasakitan***

Pagmamalasakitan embodies empathy and concern for the well-being of others and the environment, extending to holistic care for the community. Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (RA 9003) is such an example where it encourages mutual accountability in waste management. The Waste Warriors program in the Barangay Potrero, Malabon City is the example of pagmamalasakitan as residents are engaged in waste collection and monitoring in order to feel ownership of the environmental stewardship. This project has enhanced compliance of waste management to 9003 of 95 indicating the efficiency of community involvement. Dinglasan and Duenas (2023) discovered that at the Philippine Christian University, waste treatment activities are revealing the spirit of pagmamalasakitan due to the active participation of the faculty in dealing with waste. Their suggestions regarding waste segregation and composting also show their concern about the environment and health of people. RA 9003 explains that cultural values may improve the environmental policies. Through community

initiatives and the involvement of educational institutions, Filipinos demonstrate that caring for the environment is integral to caring for one another.

#### **F. Summary**

This research paper explores the intersection of Filipino cultural practices and the implementation of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (RA 9003). It examines how traditional behaviors, such as the use of bayong and palengke bags, alongside societal norms like the values of bayanihan and sachet culture, influence waste management strategies. The study underscores the importance of integrating cultural understanding into environmental planning to ensure the effective execution of RA 9003.

### **V. CONCLUSION**

This research illuminates the intricate relationship between traditional Filipino cultural practices and the implementation of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (RA 9003). Our findings reveal that cultural behaviors and societal norms play a pivotal role in shaping waste management strategies within the Filipino context. In the study, the authors stress the need to incorporate cultural knowledge in environmental planning and policymaking to ensure that the gap between the law and practice is narrowed. Bayanihan has been found to be a pillar to effective environmental conservation. Embedded within community-based efforts based on bayanihan practices are the long-term measures in waste segregation, recycling, and cutting, which have shown that cultural practices in waste management programs can increase the level of community involvement and the promotion of policy approaches that are Filipino friendly. Economic necessity has led to the use of single-use sachets which is a significant contributor to the plastic waste crisis. It has opportunities to innovative solutions, though, including corporate-led recycling programs, which demonstrates the ability of the private sector to be on the forefront of sustainable waste treatment.

Engaging communities, including business owners and customers, in waste management initiatives can promote sustainable practices. Education on waste's environmental impact and the benefits of the 3Rs can drive behavioral change. The traditional way like the use of bayong and palengke bags are consistent with the goals of RA 9003, which is to implement sustainable waste management by minimizing single-use plastics. The practices are conducive to environmental conservation, the local economies, and cultural heritage. The idea of pagmamalasakitan represents compassion and social accountability, which was found to be one of the successful implementation factors in RA 9003. Policies that appeal to the values of the community are better positioned to be taken and maintained. The implementation of RA 9003 needs to follow a synergistic strategy that embraces and takes into consideration the Filipino cultural values. Enhancing solid waste management strategies by promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the environment by promoting cultural identity is likely to increase effectiveness. This research offers valuable insights for policymakers, environmental planners, and community leaders, advocating for culturally informed approaches to ecological sustainability in the Philippines.

#### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the implementation of RA 9003:

1. **Develop Waste Management Programs:** Incorporate traditional practices and values, such as bayanihan, to foster community participation and ownership in waste management initiatives.
2. **Implement Educational Campaigns:** Emphasize the environmental benefits of traditional practices like using bayong and palengke bags, as well as the importance of community cooperation in effective waste management.
3. **Adjust Policies:** Address the challenges posed by sachet culture through incentives for sustainable packaging and potential penalties for the use of single-use plastics.
4. **Encourage Investment:** Promote investment in recycling infrastructure and innovative recovery programs from both the private and public sectors, highlighting the role of corporate responsibility and educational institutions in effective waste management.
5. **Support Further Research:** Conduct research into sustainable alternatives that focus on economically viable solutions for low-income populations, ensuring accessibility and effectiveness.

6. Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Systems: Create mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of waste management initiatives, ensuring alignment with cultural practices and the goals of RA 9003.

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