



case study

CANADA SRI LANKA MUNICIPAL COOPERATION PROGRAM



Open House:

A participatory tool to mobilize and build capacities of communities and local municipal governments

Summary

An 'Open House' is an informal event, which brings together a multitude of stakeholders under one roof - to discuss a common agenda. It is a forum which can overcome communication barriers brought about by inequities in gender, disability and by diverse ethnicity and religion. In projects relating to municipal service delivery; Open House sessions can be a conduit which creates linkages between community members, the municipal staff and policy makers – such linkages and one-to-one

interaction eventually facilitating behavioral changes among all participants.

Open House sessions were effectively adopted by the *Canada/Sri Lanka Municipal Cooperation Program (MCP)* as an information-exchange tool for its project on: *improving solid waste management services in the Southern District of Galle, Sri Lanka*. The project also aimed to strengthen the corporate planning capacity of the *Galle Municipal Council*. The program was initiated by the *Federation of Canadian*

Municipalities (FCM) in the aftermath of the Asian tsunami in December 2004 which destroyed infrastructure and exacerbated already overstretched health and sanitation systems in Galle.

This case study documents; the approaches used by MCP in conducting Open House sessions; how such sessions have contributed to cross-cutting considerations of peace building, gender equity and environmental sustainability and; the successes, challenges and lessons learnt by MCP in the process.



Situational Analysis (Post-tsunami local context):

Inefficiencies in the waste disposal and waste management practices in Galle

Galle is a port-city, densely populated, home to partisan politics and diverse ethnicities. A waste management crisis was brewing in this UNESCO designated World Heritage Site with loose garbage dumped in front of homes, which was collected by the municipal staff and disposed into the Indian Ocean due to the non-availability of the landfill site which was filled with post-tsunami debris.

The Waste Audit conducted in 12 out of 15 wards in Galle identified that nearly 83% of the total waste stream was organic - biodegradable food and yard waste, and could be composted. It also provided a low-tech solution to the garbage crisis, which could be managed with the scarce resources available to the Galle Municipality, further stretched by the impacts of the tsunami. Details of the waste audit - how it was conducted and how it gave rise to the backyard composting pilot

project is examined in the Case Study titled 'Improving Solid Waste Collection Services in Post-Tsunami Sri Lanka'.

Pilot project sites

The 1800 households within the pilot project sites of Magalle and Katugoda, were identified through the waste audits with the assistance of the Community Development Officer (CDO) of the wards. The selection of wards ensured that the backyard composting project was delivered to low income, tsunami affected people of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity - the residents being mainly Buddhist/ Sinhala in Magalle and Muslim/Tamil in Katugoda.

The need for a systematic public education process

Collective discussions with the community were necessary to;

- Create awareness - how improved waste disposal practices would impact on their health and sanitation, the environment, and the municipal resources;
- Educate - on the types of waste, how to sort household organic waste from other garbage and how to compost correctly; and

- Mobilize and harness support for the project activities;

The success of the project would largely depend on a behavioral change within the community - to accept new practices in waste management, and to bring about such a change required a structured process of public education. Open House sessions were considered as the most effective conduit to facilitate such a process.

The need to strengthen the capacity of the local Municipal Council

The municipality needed to be mobilized and empowered into action - especially to interact with community members, and to plan, prepare, implement and manage the public consultation and education plans.

Placing the responsibility of the public education process with the GMC, as well as the onus of conducting the Open House sessions to facilitate this process; resulted in an 'inclusive' approach to the project - where the municipal staff together with the community could be mobilized, educated and empowered.



The Approach

The public education plan of the pilot project

A Public Education Specialist sourced by FCM set up a Public Education Committee (PEC) which formulated an education program structured around specific education material. The Committee comprised the Medical Officer of Health, Registered Medical Officer, Public Health Inspectors, Community Development Officers, Public Health Midwives, District Environment Officers, Management Assistant and Waste Overseers. The Committee also developed an Open House work plan in order to systematically introduce the composting project to the community and to follow-up and evaluate the progress.

Developing knowledge information material for Open Houses

Education materials were printed in both local languages - Sinhala and Tamil and used culturally and politically sensitive images. The materials buttressed the core activity of the pilot project at the community level viz.; the distribution of a compost bin to each household - to manage the 80% of the waste stream that is yard waste and kitchen organics; and a 40 litre garbage pail to set out the residual waste for collection.

Education materials included:

- *A poster announcing the Open House*
- *An invitation to each household* (with additional information about the Open House, benefits of solid waste management and a registration form)
- *An education booklet* – Frequently asked questions on composting and trouble shooting, a typical South Sri Lankan diet – what goes into the compost bin and garbage pail respectively, a list of recyclable items such as paper, cardboard, plastic bottles, and additional information on recycling.
- *A kitchen poster and a set of stickers* for the lids of the bin and the pail – distinguishing between the contents of the compost bin and garbage pail.
- *Thank you cards* – which contained a packet of seeds to be distributed by the volunteers during the course of evaluations conducted subsequent to the Open Houses, to each household which successfully adopted the waste management practices introduced.

Planning and conducting an Open House

A work plan was developed by the PEC to conduct 3 open houses per week. The first Open House included 20 households selected from the two wards. With the preliminary planning and logistics being taken over by 5 volunteers from the community the participation increased to almost 70 households. The efficiency of the volunteers allowed the PEC to concentrate purely on education and follow-up activities.

Implementation : Lessons learned from Open House sessions

Open Houses encourage;

- A community based participatory approach which easily facilitates the adoption of the practices advocated;
- An 'inclusive' approach – regardless of gender, ethnicity, disability, race or religion; which facilitated a broader perspective on common issues;

- Accountability among all stakeholders (including the community and the municipal staff) through a commitment to the project initiatives;
- Extensive information exchange in a culturally sensitive manner; and
- Leadership within the local municipality.

Logistics:

Invitations

The community was kept informed through public posters and individual invitations

Location

All Open Houses were held at public buildings - such as schools, community centers, places of religious worship or libraries.

Time & date

Care was taken to ensure that the time suited both men and women and dates did not conflict with local socio-economic practices, e.g., the cultivation season

Trained staff

A minimum of 1 staff member was allocated for every 20 participants.

MCP facilitated mock Open House sessions for the staff to accustom themselves with - the education materials, how to manage public consultations, FAQs, and how to facilitate discussions to allow diverse views to be aired

Budget

Included the cost of:

- Staff time
- Public notices
- Displays, handouts and education material
- Additional resource persons to facilitate/coordinate
- Facilities - room rental, refreshments, rental of audio/visual equipment; and
- Follow-up documentation and monitoring

Education package for each participant

This included all knowledge products developed by PEC

Distribute bins and pails

This was done by the volunteers and municipal staff

Open House Agenda:

Welcome & Introduction

The Public Health Inspector or the Community Development Officer introduced the staff members facilitating the Open House.

Briefing on the Agenda

Brief overview of the MCP and the Pilot project by the PHI or the MOH.

The briefing included a synopsis on:

The current garbage situation.

How composting at a household level will benefit the individuals and the community

Details of the support provided by the municipal staff.

Group Discussions

Involved small groups of 20, facilitated by 1 or 2 staff (either the PHI or MOH).

The discussions are always interactive and touched on areas such as the common myths of composting (that composting bins emanate a smell), FAQs on composting and the rewards program.

These discussions elicited commitment from the community as well as the municipal staff.

The discussions include:

Sorting - what should be the contents of a garbage pail, and a compost bin respectively?

This was explained with the use of the kitchen poster and the education booklet.

Sort garbage into the garbage pail and a compost bin by demonstrating with the bag of their household garbage collected from the day of the workshop.

Revisit the information contained in the Education Package.

Revisit the 'Registration / Commitment Form' - be sure to read the acceptance paragraph to them, to ensure they fully understand what they have agreed to.

Conclude the Open House

The participants are thanked by the PHI or the CDO for their participation.

Monitoring and follow-up

Monitoring

Participants at an Open House were given a period of 2 weeks to start composting, subsequent to which the volunteers visited each home to review the progress and offer support if assistance was required.

Evaluations

Evaluations were carried out 2 months after an Open House by the members of the PEC

Celebrations

Successful households identified through the evaluation process were given thank you cards together with seeds and gardening pots in recognition of their efforts.



“Many organisations distributed compost pails in the past, but their efforts were not supported by any form of public education and the community continued to dump loose garbage onto the streets.

The strength that underpins MCP’s intervention is the concurrent awareness and education campaign it conducts.”

His Worship, Mr Kalum Seneviratne, Mayor of Galle

Project Results : the benefits of Open House sessions

Successful pilot projects

The education process facilitated through the Open Houses resulted in;

- Correct composting practices commenced by 90% of the households.
- Significant reduction in the organic waste set out for collection leading to lower costs of hauling and disposing waste at public expense.
- A more responsible community, with greater concern for preserving the environment in which they live.

A more beautiful and healthy city

Better waste management practices demonstrated during Open Houses has;

- Improved health and sanitation levels within the two wards
- Impacted positively on the aesthetics of the city and its environs.

- Encouraged home-gardening with the use of organic compost – this can eventually alleviate poverty and malnutrition through a livelihood option and food security.

Partners in sustainable development

Linkages developed through interaction between the community and the municipal staff, have contributed to;

- Reinforcing the community’s belief in the service delivery capabilities of the municipality;
- A better understanding within the municipality of the community’s perspectives on service delivery issues;
- A healthier environment for cooperation in designing sustainable post-tsunami reconstruction plans; and
- Influencing behavioral changes among both partners to the development process making them more conducive to adopt changes to their micro and macro environments.



A responsible Municipal Council- equipped to plan, implement and deliver.

Taking ownership of conducting the Open Houses resulted in more than developing the project management capacities of the municipal staff. It developed their technical skills to compile convincing funding proposals, conduct waste collection studies and baseline assessments, and manage volunteers.

Improved communication (both written and verbal) and public consultation skills in turn equipped the municipality with the necessary skills to;

- Manage changes in political leadership;
- Influence policy makers to support project activities and obtain their participation at Open Houses; and
- Advocate for more efficient allocation of resources –by the Council, the Mayor and through them, the provincial level decision makers.

The strengthened planning skills of the municipality has encouraged the City Commissioner to establish a committee of all donor countries and NGOs working on waste management projects in Galle MC, to coordinate the efficient use of the city resources and avoid duplication of efforts.



Crossing boundaries - the impact of Open House sessions on cross cutting themes

Social Inclusion

Open Houses excluded none by reason of race, religion, ethnicity or disability and included every household, religious institute and even an institute which housed mentally challenged children, in the pilot wards in Galle. Education material was developed in both local languages and interactions with Canadian municipal experts were facilitated by local translators.

Gender equity

Pails and bins were distributed to both male and female headed households and Open Houses encouraged the voices of women as they would be required to play a proactive role in sorting the organic waste emanating from the kitchen. The promotion of sorting recyclables from the waste stream also supported NGO recycling projects that were directed towards employment of women.

In the long term, adopting these practices on a large scale, will reduce the quantum of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide and methane) – known to contribute to global warming, which are produced when a significant amount of food and yard waste is collected at dump sites.

Environmental sustainability

The waste management practices promoted at the Open House sessions revealed how the community can contribute at their household levels to sustain the environment for future generations. A concerted effort was made to promote the environmental concerns of the project as a common responsibility of the entire city; and to extricate a sense of national pride within the community and the municipal staff to preserve the World Heritage Site in which they live.

Advocating improved waste management practices within the community also imbibed a sense of social responsibility among the municipal staff, spurring them to proactively search for a suitable dump site rather than back-dumping into the ocean.

Replication and sustainability

The success of educating the community through Open Houses and the lessons learned in the process, indicate that the Open House concept could be a catalyst to introducing similar community-based participatory interventions, especially in municipal service delivery projects. In many countries such as Sri Lanka where municipal resources are scarce, there is limited interaction between the service receivers and providers leading to misconceptions between the community and local authorities on the effective use of such resources. Interventions such as Open Houses help to show how public involvement is needed to effectively implement local government plans.

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