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Waste as a source of wealth

THE Waste Management Association of Malaysia (WMAM) shares the views expressed in "Take action on waste management" (*The Star*, Oct 4; online at <https://bit.ly/3ygjiU0>) that many Malaysians have not fully grasped the importance of waste management and the idea of recycling despite many years of national campaigns and enforcement efforts.

In fact, WMAM has for many years pointed out the main reasons that generally explain Malaysians' apathy towards waste reduction and littering habits. These are:

i) Lack of enforcement of the relevant laws, which are also not uniform throughout the states. In Perlis, Kedah, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Melaka, Johor, Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya, waste management is governed by the Solid Waste and Public Cleansing Management Act, 2007 (Act 672). This Act is administered and enforced by the director-general of Solid Waste and Public Cleansing under the Housing and Local Government Ministry and the statutory body SWCorp, which was established on June 1, 2008.

Other states in Peninsular Malaysia are still governed by the Local Government Act, 1972 (Act 171) while Sabah and Sarawak have their own laws.

ii) Malaysians do not directly have to pay for treatment, transport and disposal of solid waste even though they pay assessment



rates to the local authorities; and
iii) Poor public education.

WMAM is also of the view that insufficiency of proper recycling facilities in Malaysia has slowed down proper waste management processes among the community.

No matter how good the efforts at recycling are, without sufficient facilities, the situation is not going to improve in the long run. After all, we have been talking about recycling since the late 1980s.

This is proven in Putrajaya where statistics show that the amount of recyclable waste collected there far exceeds that in Kuala Lumpur even though Kuala Lumpur's population is many times larger than Putrajaya's. However, Putrajaya Corporation (PPJ) has done a great job by placing more

collection bins for recyclables in various housing areas.

"Reduce" should be emphasised before "reuse" and "recycle". Reduce should start with reducing consumption and hence reduce waste generation by doing proper segregation of waste before dumping the garbage for collection and transport to waste treatment facilities.

Separation at source should be encouraged, but unfortunately enforcement has been rather lacking due to the non-uniformity of laws.

Similarly, public participation in separation at source appears to be low and tends to require a carrot-and-stick approach. Of course, some companies have been promoting monetary incentives for

recyclables via mobile applications, but this is not good enough to yield long-term results. The focus of waste management should be on providing good and sound infrastructures and solutions to encourage greater public participation to promote a circular economy.

The current solid waste management system, which is based on linear economy practices – extracting, making use of and disposing solid waste – is no longer sustainable. Linear practices have caused a high percentage of waste extraction to become waste again every year.

Malaysians must not have the notion that waste is a problem. It is not. Waste is a resource! We can monetise waste or convert it to wealth. To this end, we must work towards a circular economy model in waste management.

All in all, education is the key to changing both our mindset and behaviour in order to achieve sustainable consumption and minimise wastage. In this respect, we have much to learn from the Japanese in the way they handle waste from cradle to grave. This can only be done through education and by inculcating this culture in our children starting from primary school.

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