Mutare  
Paper Recycling and Composting Project

**FULL NAME OF MUNICIPALITY**
Municipality of Mutare, Zimbabwe

**MUNICIPAL PROFILE**
- **Population:** 149,000
- **Land Area:** 167 km²
- **Municipal Budget:** US$14.3 million

**PROJECT NAME**
Paper Recycling and Composting Project

**CHALLENGE ADDRESSED**
Waste Reduction and Poverty Alleviation

**DESIRED OUTCOME/GOAL**
The project aimed to divert a significant portion of organic and paper waste away from the dumpsite in Mutare, while addressing poverty concerns within the city.

**STRATEGY USED**
By working with community partners, Mutare reduced waste going to their dumpsite through composting at both the municipal and household levels, and through recycling initiatives on the part of the local authority, private sector and community. As well, the community was mobilized to ensure support and participation in waste reduction and recycling. As part of these initiatives, Mutare created employment opportunities for both women and youth.

**ABSTRACT**
Mutare City Council, Zimbabwe, engaged community partners including industries, youth groups and local residents, to pilot a program to increase the life span of the local dumpsite and improve the livelihoods of local residents. As part of their Local Agenda 21 initiatives, the city received funds from the Incentive Grants Project to implement concrete projects to divert waste. A waste paper recycling project was started, and provides employment for youth. Household and municipal composting pilot projects were also started. These projects are proving to be useful approaches to integrated environmental management. Experiences gained through these projects have resulted in the removal of communication barriers between the local authority and its constituents, which bodes well for expanding the scope of waste recycling and composting in Mutare in the future.

**CASE**
Mutare, the fourth largest city in Zimbabwe, is situated in the eastern part of the country on the Mozambique border. Mutare occupies a strategic position along the Beira Corridor, a 300-kilometer transportation route linking land-locked Zimbabwe with the port of Beira, Mozambique, on the Indian Ocean.

Mutare’s population is growing at an annual rate of 3.5 percent. The city’s main industries include timber, factories, textiles, canning and vehicle assembly. Despite its strategic location and significant natural resource base, economic growth, as well as employment creation and provision of...
basic services like sanitation and primary health care, have not kept pace with population growth. As a result, Mutare is challenged by increasing poverty, mushrooming informal settlements and a growing incidence of crime.

Squatting and subletting within formal settlements makes household garbage collection difficult, and refuse is often dumped on roadways and then burnt. The city does not have enough refuse collection vehicles, and those that do exist are outdated and subject to frequent breakdowns. Given that 79 percent of the city’s waste is organic material, with an additional 7.9 percent comprised of paper, recycling and composting offered Mutare an opportunity to reduce the volume of waste going to disposal, thereby increasing the life span of the dumpsite and reducing the costs of collecting and transporting.

Most of the recycling is done by the informal sector in Mutare. As in other cities in the developing world, the informal sector suffers from a lack of access to credit and formal urban services. Within the City of Mutare most of the recycling is done by residents of Sakubva, the oldest low-income suburb in the city. Due to its colonial legacy, the settlement is situated close to the dumpsite and to formal industries. Recycling of material from the dumpsite is done informally. Scouring the dumpsite for paper poses serious risks, both in terms of pathogens and poor health, and in terms of conflicts with other recycling competitors. The activities of the recyclers at the dumpsite were also restricted by the lack of transportation to carry materials from the site to waste paper processors, and by the soiling of paper from other garbage.

At the end of 1997, the City of Mutare established a relationship with the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) that led to the establishment of a Local Agenda 21 (LA21) Forum in 1998. Prior to this an Environment Committee had been established, consisting of stakeholders from environmental groups, industry and commerce, universities, and city council. At the committee’s first meeting in 1994, an action planning process identified waste management as a priority area, focusing on better handling of industrial wastes. The Environment Committee’s work concentrated mainly on environmental management and not the broader aspects of sustainable development like employment generation and community development.

Although the Environment Committee was successful in engaging industry and business in a partnership with the local authority, the LA21 Forum enabled a broader spectrum of issues to be on the agenda, and a broader cross-section of stakeholders brought to the table. The LA21 initiative gained further momentum when it received funding from the Incentive Grants Project (IGP) to implement tangible projects identified as priorities through the action planning process. The LA21 group identified as a priority the need to divert waste from the dumpsite through composting and recycling while providing marginalized women and youth with skills training and employment, the private sector with more raw materials and the local authority with an opportunity to reduce some of the costs associated with collection and disposal of waste.

Mutare’s ability to address its waste management concerns were further enhanced through its “twinning” with the City of Haarlem in the Netherlands. Through this partnership a study was undertaken on waste management in Mutare in 1996. Haarlem has continued to support Mutare in various ways and has shared with Mutare various models for community participation. The partnerships with Haarlem and ICLEI, and the commitment of the LA21 Forum, enabled the city to conduct a community-based assessment of the situation in Sakubva. The study served as the basis upon which the waste management projects have unfolded.

Essentially, the goals of the project were to:
- increase the life span of the municipal dumpsite,
- improve environmental awareness of Mutare residents and increase their well-being through better environmental management,
- generate income for youths and women through the sale of waste paper and the use of organic compost.

Between 1997 and 2000, the IGP provided small grants to local stakeholder groups for developing and implementing LA21 action plans in 18 cities in Latin America, Africa and Turkey. The grants allowed the groups to solve problems identified during the LA21 planning process, with projects in areas such as waste management and stream restoration. The project was funded by the Open Society Institute and implemented by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (www.iclei.org/la21/igp.htm).
Three strategies were used in fulfilling these goals, including community composting, municipal composting and paper recycling.

A small area in Sakubva was selected to pilot the composting project. Households in this area were already engaged in vegetable gardening to supplement household nutrition and income, and the finished compost could provide a useful soil amendment for their gardens. A group of 60 people, mostly women, were recruited to participate in composting organic waste. They received training on the establishment and use of compost from the city’s Parks and Recreation Department.

Plans were also made to undertake composting at the municipal level. Organic wastes would be collected from markets and delivered to the dumpsite where a shredder and compost beds would be established. The compost would be used in city parks and gardens.

A paper recycling initiative was organized by the city council’s LA21 coordinator, who played a role in educating waste producers on separating their wastes, and negotiated with private companies and government offices to set up waste paper collection bays on the premises of businesses known to produce a lot of waste paper. Youth groups began collecting paper from these bays and transporting it to the paper mills at which they were paid for the paper collected. The city council itself participates in the recycling program and has a collection bay at its head office.

RESULTS
One youth group in the Sakubva community now has a source of regular income for each of its members. Currently the group earns about US 1¢ per kilogram of waste. In an average month individuals within the group earn slightly more than the government stipulated minimum wage. About 10 percent of the income generated is set aside for the club. This money is to be used to purchase and repair the pushcarts used for waste paper collection.

As for the waste being composted, the amount being composted at both the community and municipal level so far represents a very small fraction of the waste being generated in Sakubva. But the composting initiatives were established as pilot projects only, and it was never expected that the scope of these projects would be sufficient to have a citywide impact on the amount of waste going to disposal.

The most significant benefit of these projects has been the bringing together of different stakeholders, including youth, low-income communities, business and city council, to open communication channels and initiate a dialogue on how integrated urban environmental management can be achieved in Mutare. The projects have successfully demonstrated that it can be done on a larger scale.

Overall, the environmental awareness of city council staff and councillors has improved. A reflection workshop held by the LA21 Forum managed to attract 10 out of the 18 elected councillors.

LESSONS LEARNED
This waste management project is only the beginning of a more holistic approach to urban environmental management in Mutare. Within the Sakubva community, the project generated significant awareness of the need for a multisectoral approach to urban environmental management. The community-based assessment study conducted in Sakubva is one of the tools that has helped to promote a broader perspective of local needs. This awareness is a very positive development in terms of ensuring the long-term sustainability of community involvement in decision making, and will promote better integration between the issues discussed and the plans made within the LA21 Forum and the city council. The momentum for truly representative decision making MUST originate at the grassroots level rather than be imposed in a top-down fashion.
Environmental problems are most successfully addressed when they are tackled in a way that addresses the local social perceptions and values. In poor neighbourhoods that have always had waste improperly disposed of, cleaning up the environment will not be a priority unless direct economic, health and social benefits are immediately apparent.

Partnership building and enhancing trust between stakeholders is an important element in ensuring long-term sustainability. The experience of most councillors with environmentally concerned groups has often been negative and confrontational. In Mutare, misunderstandings, negative perceptions and contentious issues have to be dealt with through open dialogue. Mutual acceptance of all stakeholders, including councillors, can be strengthened by training workshops, as well as having the support of the mayor.

**KEY REPLICATION FACTORS**

Urban environmental management must be carried out in a manner that addresses the root causes of environmental degradation, that is, poverty alleviation must be the starting point. Environmental efforts are unlikely to be viewed as legitimate unless they address poverty and basic needs.

Youth groups are an important part of the local community structure. Youth have the energy and willingness to try out new concepts, especially where there is a potential for self-improvement.

The environment needs to be taken out of the environment department—municipalities need to take an interdisciplinary approach to urban management. In the case of Mutare, the waste, housing, parks and recreation, and health departments have all contributed to the projects. The current work is headed by the health department, but the departments that will benefit most directly from the activities are waste and parks.

**BUDGET**

Mutare received a disbursement of US$21,718 from the IGP.

**KEY CONTACT**

Mrs. E. Muyambuki  
Department of Health  
Mutare City Council  
P.O.Box.910, Mutare.  
**TELEPHONE:** +263/20-644-12  
**FAX:** +263/21-677-85  
**EMAIL:** eunicem@mutare.intersol.co.zw

**REFERENCES**


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The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives is a membership organization of local governments and their associations. The Council’s mission is to build and support a worldwide movement of local governments to achieve tangible improvements in global environmental conditions through the cumulative impact of local actions.

16th Floor, West Tower  
City Hall, Toronto, Ontario, Canada  M5H 2N2  
**TELEPHONE:** +1-416/392-1462  
**FAX:** +1-416/392-1478  
**EMAIL:** iclei@iclei.org  
**WEBSITE:** www.iclei.org

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1 In Mutare, approximately 10 percent of the population is employed in the informal sector of the economy.