

A Milestone Project in Dhaka

After more than 15 years of combating the serious waste problem in Dhaka, Bangladesh, a Japanese team of experts has succeeded in changing local attitudes

In Dhaka, the crowded capital city of the South Asian country of Bangladesh, garbage used to pile up in vacant land and along river banks. In 2004, it was estimated that only 43.5% of garbage was collected, and the final disposal destination was exclusively landfill.

The Bangladesh government asked the Japanese government for cooperation to tackle this issue, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) stepped up to help with Dhaka's waste problem. An integral player for this has been Akio Ishii, a waste management specialist who offered extensive skills and know-how from his involvement in government waste management at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and his experience in development consultancy. After the end of a series of surveys and preparation of the Master Plan, a project coined the "Clean Dhaka Project" was launched in 2007.

According to Akiko Sanada, the officer at the JICA Bangladesh Office at that time, "Whether or not a capital city has the infrastructure to deal with issues like a garbage problem is a very crucial factor for attracting people and investment."

After setting a target of raising the garbage collection rate to



Bustling Dhaka is now much better at managing its waste.

65.5% by 2015, the Clean Dhaka Project helped implement a waste management approach based on citizen involvement.

The project established garbage collection offices in each ward and constructed a locally customized garbage collection system. At first, it was a struggle to start up any kind of communication between the citizens, city office staff, and cleaners due to a lack

of experience talking with people of different heritages and status. Ishii and the team held events such as a workshop in front of the Dhaka City Corporation Building that attracted 300 cleaners. These events established opportunities to link up the stakeholders, who were separated from each other by societal differences. It created the foundations for building a waste management system where



Garbage, collected in tricycle carts, is taken to a garbage truck that was donated by Japan, making collection very efficient.



Posters are created to show how to recycle, etc.



Still today, Ishii is in the field striving to expand the project to places outside Dhaka.



Each safety workshop held for cleaning crews attracts more than 300 participants.

everyone works together.

Then in 2010, the Japanese government donated 100 garbage trucks as part of grant aid. "Some of

the areas had never had a garbage truck before. Also we instantly established an efficient collection system," explains Ishii.

Ishii says that as results accumulated, the project seemed to really generate enthusiasm. The cleaners became more aware of their important role of protecting the healthy life of citizens while the city office began to sense the need to work cooperatively with the cleaners. Meanwhile the citizens' new-found enthusiasm to participate in keeping their own town clean has led to a continuing momentum through the holding of citizen-led "Clean Dhaka Events."

As a result, the 2015 target of a 65% garbage collection rate was reached ahead of plan in 2014.

"This project also had a positive effect on government policy because the spirit of cooperation influenced how people worked together on not just the garbage problem but other issues as well. The garbage disposal experience seemed to change even the very culture in government offices," relates Ishii.

The Clean Dhaka Project can be considered a "milestone" project that has not only changed the stakeholders' mindsets with respect to garbage, but also changed the government's approach to citizens and to carrying out public policy, and, perhaps, it will lead to further development for Bangladesh, whose annual economic growth continues above 7%. [1] *



After being the onsite project officer in Bangladesh for three and a half years, Akiko Sanada continues to support the project after returning to Japan.

[1] Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) website, "Bangladesh Outline," June 26, 2018.