

# ECOWASTE COALITION: **BUILDING A STRONGER ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT**



It was a major victory following the passage of the Philippine Clean Air Act in June 1999 with a groundbreaking national ban on incineration that led to the formation of the Ecological Solid Waste Coalition of the Philippines (EcoWaste Coalition). The alliance of civil society organizations that campaigned hard for the passage of the law, then called the Clean Air Coalition, was a loose group of environmental advocates, impacted communities, and their support organizations campaigning for national clean air legislation. Some of the organizations at the forefront of the campaign included Greenpeace International, Mother Earth Foundation, Zero Waste Recycling Movement of the Philippines, Concerned Citizens Against Pollution (COCAP), Partnership for Clean Air, Haribon Foundation, Miriam PEACE, church-based organizations, communities hosting waste facilities such as San Mateo (Rizal) and Carmona (Cavite), and ABS-CBN's Bantay Kalikasan, among others.

Harnessing the energy from that victory and not wanting to waste time, it was but a matter of natural progression to choose an ecological solid waste management policy as the next campaign since the battle against incineration is intrinsically connected to the solid waste conundrum. At that time, too, the solid waste problem had become a front-and-center issue. The infamous Smokey Mountain dumpsite was ordered closed back in 1995. Dumpsites were sprouting in many places around the country and proposals for incinerators were being put forward by the Metro Manila Development



Barangay public assembly on proper segregated waste management at GMA, Cavite

Authority. Community resistance was growing especially in Carmona, Cavite and San Mateo, Rizal — base of the two existing landfills — as well as in other areas being targeted for landfill development as reported by Landfill Watch, the anti-landfill project of the National Secretariat for Social Action of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (NASSA-CBCP).

Landfill Watch approached Greenpeace Philippines about the issue, so on January 14, 2000, NASSA-CBCP and Greenpeace organized a multi-sectoral conference on ecological waste management.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the day, a Unity Statement to work towards a vision of Zero Waste by 2020 was forged as a way to block efforts to establish landfills and other end-of-pipe waste facilities, mainstreaming a Zero Waste framework, and protecting the gains of the Clean Air Act. This was the impetus behind the formation of the EcoWaste Coalition. By signing on the Unity Statement, the Clean Air Coalition member-organizations became the founding members of EcoWaste Coalition, together with NASSA-CBCP and their network of church-based organizations.

In the Unity Statement, members agreed to “advance (1) simple solutions on the (2) local level, using an (3) Integrated approach (holistic approach) to harness local talents and energies” while ensuring that “the local community enjoys the (4) economic benefits from such initiatives in a (5) sustainable manner.”<sup>2</sup>

To achieve its Zero Waste vision, Ecowaste Coalition members chose to focus on the following key action points:

- Stopping incineration;
- Reducing the volume of garbage;
- Reducing toxicity of garbage;
- Intensifying recycling and composting; and
- Developing recycling markets.

In addition, the Statement clearly laid out the issues for opposition to landfilling: land use, environmental and public health with the inevitable contamination, intergenerational ethics, and social concerns.

After a few years of operation, the core work of the membership was categorized under seven task forces: (1) dumps and landfills; (2) plastics; (3) open burning and incineration; (4) wealth from waste; (5) extended producer responsibility (EPR); (6) inner ecology; and (7) organic farming.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Von Hernandez in a zoom call organized by GAIA. July 15, 2022. In 2000, Von represented Greenpeace International.

<sup>2</sup>Unity Statement. EcoWaste Coalition. Multisectoral Conference on Ecological Waste Management. Jan. 14, 2000. Environment Education Center. Miriam College. Loyola Heights, Quezon City.

<sup>3</sup>Amended Organizational Policies and Procedures Manual. EcoWaste Coalition. Nov. 2019. Adopted by the General Assembly in 2016 and 2018.



Case filing of the waste-to-energy guidelines at the Supreme Court



International awareness event on lead in paint

Throughout its 22-year history, the organization has gone through many changes in the issues they have taken on and in its operations. Its core work presented numerous opportunities to campaign alongside international organizations and alliances such as Greenpeace, Health Care Without Harm, Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives (GAIA), International POPs Elimination Network (IPEN), and Break Free From Plastic (BFFP).

While its focus remained on waste, pollution and chemical safety, on many occasions, Ecowaste Coalition has also lent its voice in solidarity to other network partners in their environmental and social justice campaigns including Magkaisa Junk JPEPA Coalition – a campaign against the ratification of the Japan Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement specifically looking at waste dumping provisions, Green Convergence for safe food, health and environment on various environment-related issues, Pinoy Ayaw sa Illegitimate Debt (PAID) particularly acting as watchdog of funding mechanisms going into pollutive technologies including

incinerators, Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Alliance, Philippines (FCAP)<sup>4</sup>, to mention a few.

Geographically, too, what used to be a Manila-centric membership and a few key battlegrounds like Cavite and Rizal when it began, has increased its presence and membership to other parts of the country, specifically, Visayas and Mindanao where some of the crucial grassroots campaign battlegrounds are located.

As 2020 approached, Ecowaste conducted a review to reflect on whether or not its work has brought the country closer to the Zero Waste 2020 vision. The membership realized that the action points and the work plans developed were short-term and difficult to measure.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the Unity Statement was amended to move the goal post to achieving Zero Waste by 2030 and changing the focus of some of the work.<sup>6</sup> Two action points from the original statement reiterated the need to stop all forms of incineration including

<sup>4</sup>Ecowaste Coalition seeks regulatory action vs. Cigarette Butt Waste. April 10, 2012. <http://ecowastecoalition.blogspot.com/2012/04/ecowaste-coalition-seeks-regulatory.html>

<sup>5</sup>Eileen Sison during the Zoom call organized by GAIA. June 24, 2022.

<sup>6</sup>Amended Unity Statement. EcoWaste Coalition General Assembly. June 2018. QCX Museum, Quezon City.

incinerators-in-disguise and to intensify recycling and composting efforts. As the work grew, nuances of the issues required additional focus.

To reflect nuances in the evolution of the issues and focus of the work the following action points were added:

- Design systems and products to eliminate waste;
- Eliminate toxins in processes, products, and waste; and
- Campaign for extended producer's responsibility.

The Task Forces, the venue for member participation, were also adjusted to focus on (1) sustainable consumption and lifestyle; (2) chemical safety; (3) dumps and incinerators; (4) ecological agriculture; and (5) plastic.

The Amended Statement also reiterated that its policy framework, plan of action, and Zero Waste lifestyle be anchored on waste prevention, reduction, separation, recycling, and composting.

In the January 2022 Strategic Assessment and Planning, one of the agreements arrived at was to redefine Zero Waste to include circularity and climate emergency to be presented to the General Assembly for approval.<sup>7</sup>

When it was founded in 2000, Ecowaste Coalition was a loose alliance of mostly Metro Manila-based organizations. Its lean secretariat was initially housed with Greenpeace, followed by Caritas Philippines, and then GAIA Asia Pacific until it was able to establish itself as a separate entity.<sup>8</sup> It was only in June 2005 that EcoWaste Coalition was registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as an independent, non-stock, and non-profit organization.<sup>9</sup> This Steering Committee decision was prompted by the need to formalize its operational structure to be able to function better as a secretariat and increase ability to access funds to sustain its operations.<sup>10</sup> The secretariat has grown from a two-person team in 2000 to having its own office and its own distinct identity, separate from its host organizations in 2006. Today, EcoWaste has a broad staff complement and its membership today lists 125 organizations distributed throughout the whole Philippines.

## WORKING TOGETHER

In its early years, the secretariat was composed of a national coordinator and an assistant coordinator, providing support for agreed campaigns and facilitating the communication between members at a time and age when landlines and fax machines were the communication

hardware. This was the most fundamental structure that the Coalition could function with given the task then of coordinating campaign activities and skillshares for members among members was not as complex as it is now. For example, in the early years, when there were campaign developments either at the grassroots or national level, the Secretariat or the concerned member organization would call for campaign support and together they would design and implement a response, be it a press statement, a mobilization, a lobby meeting, etc. Emailing was new and the general membership had not yet caught on, especially those living outside Metro Manila and the big urban centers in the country. At that time, it served the purpose well as many of the coalition's early members who were mostly based in Metro Manila and communities in Cavite and Rizal battling landfill cases.



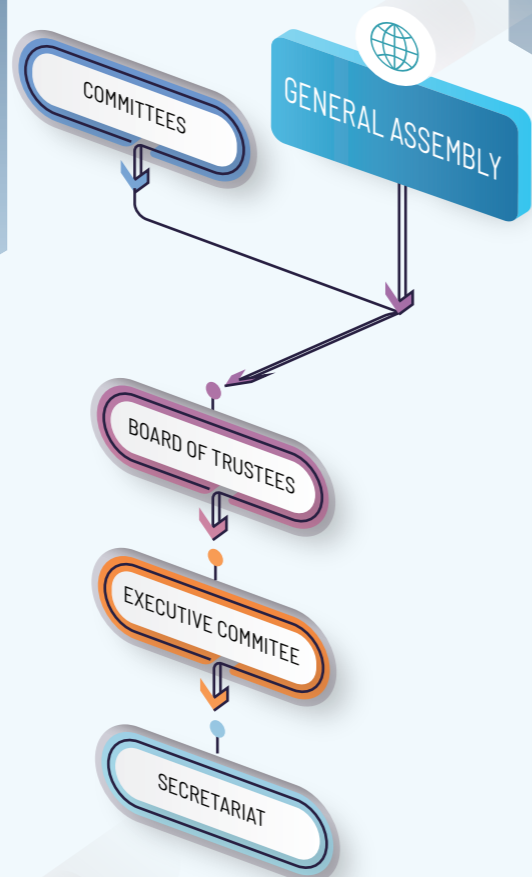
<sup>7</sup>011422 Key Highlights\_EWC Formative Strategy Assessment.

<sup>8</sup>Rei Panaligan during the Zoom call organized by GAIA. June 24, 2022.

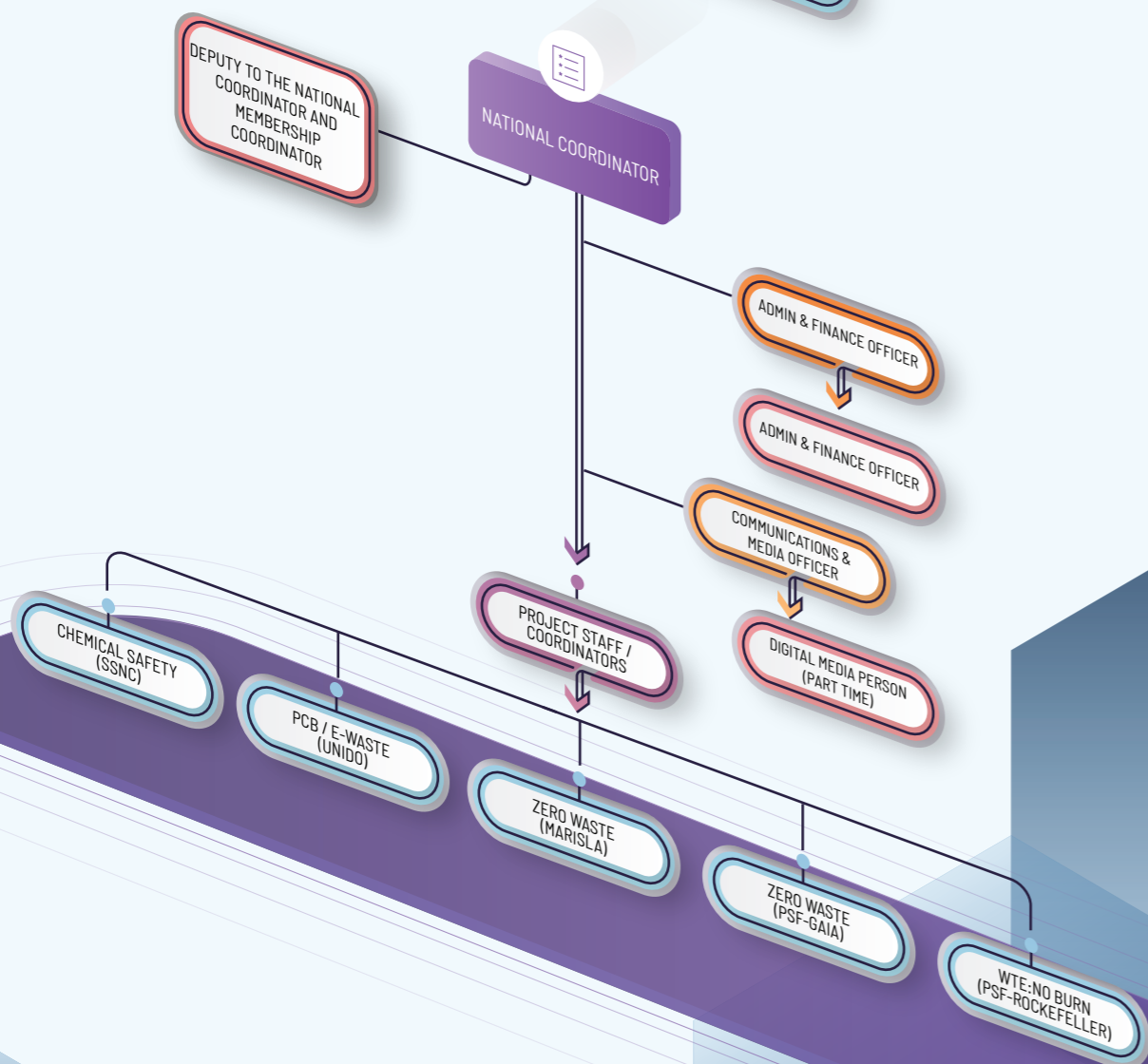
<sup>9</sup>Aileen Lucero during the Zoom call organized by GAIA. June 24, 2022.

<sup>10</sup>Phone conversation with Manny Calanzo. Sept. 21, 2022.

**FIGURE 1:  
ORGANIZATIONAL  
STRUCTURE**



**FIGURE 2: STRUCTURE  
OF THE SECRETARIAT**



Launching of the country's first ever materials recovery facility (MRF) turned transport, storage, and disposal (TSD) facility on electronic waste (e-waste) in Bagong Silang, Caloocan City

1. In today's structure, **the General Assembly (GA)** remains the highest decision-making body, approving the strategic direction of the Coalition and electing the Board of Trustees (the Steering Committee in the early days) to a two-year term during its annual general assembly. As it stands, the membership has expanded its reach geographically and across sectors.  
  
The members are organizations who subscribe to the basic principles of environmental and social justice, gender-fairness, democracy and non-violence. Each organization is given one voting right in the Assembly.
2. The **Board of Trustees (BOT)** that meets every two months is mainly responsible for developing, approving, and reviewing programs, organizational policies and strategic actions, work plans and budgets, ensuring that the organization complies with legal requirements, supporting fundraising efforts, and formulating success indicators of the

Zero Waste work. It also reviews and approves applications for membership.

There is a conscious effort to geographically distribute representation to the 11-member Board of Trustees (BOT) according to major island groupings: Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao, and the National Capital Region.<sup>11</sup>

3. The **Executive Committee (ExeCom)** which meets on a monthly basis or if needed, is composed of the President, the Secretary, the Treasurer, and the National Coordinator sitting in an ex-officio capacity. They ensure accountability, compliance to legal requirements, and efficient decision-making. They recommend policies, projects, and programs for BOT approval; screens membership applications for BOT approval; and hires and evaluates the national coordinator.
4. The **Secretariat/Operations Management Office** is headed by the National Coordinator and supported

<sup>11</sup>A Aileen Lucero during the Zoom Call organized by GAIA. June 24, 2022.



Launching of Solid Waste on Wheels at Trece Martires City to complement the city's Zero Waste Program

by the Administrative and Finance Officer and the Project Staff (also known as Campaigners). Together they are responsible for the coordination and leadership in the execution of the programs and activities of the Coalition as well as management of its financial and human resources.

5. As spelled out in the Unity Statement, the five **Task Forces** are the venues by which members participate in organizational work on a voluntary basis. Members choose which Task Force is relevant to their work.

In the previous lineup of five Task Forces, the members observed that the same organizations were participating in some, if not all, activities of the different Task Forces.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in 2015, the BOT decided to streamline the work of the five Task Forces into two Committees.<sup>13</sup>

- ESWM Committee composed of the Task Forces on dump and incinerators, ecological

agriculture, plastics, and sustainable consumption/responsible consumption

- Clean Production Committee composed of the Task Forces on chemical safety, plastic, and other work on POPs, e-waste, pesticides, contaminated sites, and EPR.

Each Committee is responsible for developing its annual work plan with success indicators and is coordinated by a member of the Secretariat. A member is elected by the committee members to chair for a period of two years and a campaigner sits in the committee as coordinator for communications, administrative and logistical support. Its members meet on a quarterly basis. Reports to the organization up to the General Assembly is done through an email listserv and social media messaging. There was an attempt in the past to produce digital newsletters but was short lived.<sup>14</sup>

6. The establishment of **Ad Hoc Bodies** will be determined by the BOT to respond to very specific urgent needs.

When EcoWaste Coalition started, the Secretariat was hosted by a member organization. The hosting changed from year to year. While this arrangement worked well at first, as the work expanded and the membership increased, the demands on the host organization for support also increased, putting some strain on the host.<sup>15</sup> The decision to register it with the SEC in 2005 gave the Coalition the space to establish itself as an entity separate from its host. This also allowed them to seek funding opportunities to support the broader demands of its membership.

### A. FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

Challenges are innately related to organizational growth. A fundamental question that EcoWaste has had to face and continues to face is its position on landfills. While the Unity Statement is clear in the opposition to "landfilling as the backbone of a waste management strategy on the basis of practical, ethical, health, economic and environmental

grounds," some members argue that this position has to consider the impacts on the informal waste sector, who are also members of the Coalition.<sup>16</sup> The position on landfills remains and was reiterated in the resolution issued by the Luzon Assembly in relation to keeping dumpsites and landfills out of Manila Bay.<sup>17</sup>

However, it must be noted that when Republic Act (RA) 9003 was still being deliberated in congress, landfilling was "accepted" as a temporary, time-bound (Zero Waste by 2020 vision) measure as a legislative bicameral conference compromise, otherwise, there was a strong likelihood that the proposed bill would not have passed into law.

Similar questions crop up when plastic waste recycling is discussed. Some members firmly believe that recycling, upcycling, or downcycling is a possible solution to the plastic waste crisis while others strongly take on a "recycling-is-a-myth" position.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Rei Panaligan during the zoom call organized by GAIA. June 24, 2022.

<sup>16</sup>Eileen Sison during the Zoom call organized by GAIA. June 24, 2022.

<sup>17</sup>Resolution on Keeping Wastes, Pollutants, Dumpsites and Landfills Out of Manila Bay. Adopted by the General Assembly of Luzon Members on January 31, 2012 at UP Diliman, Quezon City.

<sup>18</sup>Von Hernandez during the zoom call organized by GAIA. July 15, 2022.

<sup>12</sup>Phone conversation with Manny Calonzo. Sept. 21, 1922.

<sup>13</sup>Amended Organizational Policies and Procedures Manual. EcoWaste Coalition. Nov. 2019. Adopted by the General Assembly in 2016 and 2018.

<sup>14</sup>Phone conversation with Manny Calonzo. Sept. 21, 2022.

## B. INTERNAL RELATIONS AND SUSTAINING ACTIVE MEMBER PARTICIPATION

In its infancy, one of the notable issues that the coalition faced was “turfing” in terms of pioneering work on Zero Waste (who started what) or geographical areas (who’s working in a specific location, overlapping work locations). These were resolved peacefully in face-to-face meetings. As the organization matured, organizational development systems put in place and better coordination by the Secretariat were able to address some of the challenges. Thankfully, it was pointed out that there have been no major conflicts yet in its 22-year history that have resulted in acrimonious fights among members and had to go through the Coalition’s formal mediation process.

While participation has gone through ebbs and flows through time depending on funded work, recent efforts to sustain member engagement have been put in place. For some time, there was a perception among members that the work program of the Coalition is Secretariat-led and that members are only called upon as the need arose.

To respond to this problem, the Secretariat developed a membership and partnership program with a specific staff assigned to it. Another change it made was the strengthening of chapters in Cebu (for Visayas members) and Davao (for Mindanao members) to encourage participation in the regions. A membership database has also been set up where members’ campaigns are indicated. This allows the Secretariat to actively engage members for specific projects and campaigns, ensure member-to-member collaboration, and refer them to possible funding sources should they wish to send proposals for their work. Now, members are involved in strategic planning at the regional level and their plans feed into the overall Coalition strategic plans, making them program co-implementers instead of activity participants.

There is also a need to develop campaign second-liners at this time. Many of the active campaigners are aging or taking on different roles in their respective organizations (e.g. management) and have not trained up enough young people to take their place especially in the area of policy engagement. For many years, the Coalition merely relied on its members to develop their own capacities and not see it as an issue up until now when many of the more senior activists have moved on to other roles or to other non-member organizations or have passed on. Active participation by member organizations have

also been limited to a few in the past. With the new vigorous effort to build up the regional centers, it is hoped that more organizations become more engaged in Coalition work. Hence the need to invest in growing and strengthening the movement, diversifying the voices, and finding opportunities to work with other groups that have similar advocacies.

## C. EXTERNAL THREAT

The leadership of the recently elected national government is seen as a threat to the Coalition’s operations. Whereas, in the Duterte administration, anyone critical of the government and its programs were red-tagged (labeled as anti-government) and a rise in extra-judicial killings of environmental defenders has been documented, members of the EcoWaste Coalition believe things will worsen with the current administration.<sup>26</sup> More arrests are expected and risks to lives and personal safety is bound to increase. The question then to ask its members is how to engage government and campaign targets given this situation. As advocates, the work will continue regardless of the party in power. Through a thorough power analysis in campaign-planning, agreement can be reached on who is best to target given the circumstances, incisive messaging and strategies, and who the best messengers are. In addition, it is important to do a security assessment on campaign and activity plans more so at a time when civil liberties are challenged by government forces and private groups or individuals energized by government propaganda.

## D. IMPROVING OPERATIONS THROUGH ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2021, EcoWaste hired the services of Visus Consulting to evaluate the effectiveness of their 2018-2020 short term plan. Based on their findings, these are some of the key recommendations relevant to the goal of this case study which can provide insights in alliance building:<sup>27</sup>

For the Board of Trustees: institutionalize planning and monitoring in policy which should be reflected in the Manual of Policies and Procedures.

For the Secretariat: Establish a Monitoring and Evaluation unit, putting in place systems of reporting, developing templates and generating knowledge products out of reports and stories from the regions.

For the Member Organizations: Localize national plans to the regional level and participate in the monitoring function of the coalition.

## BEST PRACTICES

The Unity Statement signed by members from the very beginning, in EcoWaste Coalition’s experience, is viewed positively because it gave the members an advocacy framework and priorities for action that they can work on together. As EcoWaste evolved, the need to make its operations more agile, transparent, fair, and accountable arose; hence, a Manual of Operations was developed for staff and members. The following are the list of policies in place and are found in the manual:

- Statement of Professional Ethics and Code of Conduct
- HIV/AIDS Policy
- Policy on Women and Chemical Safety
- Policy to Prevent, Detect and Act Against Fraud and Corruption
- Policy on Representing the EcoWaste
- Policy on Conflict of Interest
- Policy on Gender
- Audit Charter
- Amended Policy on Procurement
- Resolution on Delegating Past Presidents

To track progress of the Coalition’s work, a regular assessment is necessary to allow it to respond quickly and effectively when sudden shifts in the socio-political, economic and environmental realities occur. Having an ear on the ground through the regional members doing their own regional assessments and planning and regular feedbacking contributes significantly to that agility and responsiveness of the whole organization.

## MAJOR TAKEAWAYS

### 1. Alliance-building is finding common ground to achieve what we cannot achieve on our own.

Alliance-building is intrinsically about developing human relationships, making an appeal to the person to combine resources to carry out a common set of objectives for mutual benefits. Therefore, establishing rapport on a personal and organization level through message choices, tone and manner of communicating is crucial to the success or failure of alliances.

### 2. A social issue is an opportunity for building alliances but making it strong takes time and experience.

As an advocacy group, a powerful alliance entails building its internal strength and reaching out to potential partners

externally because in a political arena, numbers matter. Each organization within the coalition brings with it a set of expertise and constituency contributing to the political power needed to achieve the common goal. An external alliance makes the coalition’s position even stronger as they may bring in resources that the coalition may not otherwise have access to. Examples of external allies could include research institutions, legal support groups, or green businesses. All these take time and effort, open minds and plenty of patience. It is through long experience working with one another, understanding the nature and limitations of each member organization, and the ability to adjust, that some of the difficulties are surmounted.

### 3. A clear set of principles, structure and policies can help different organizations to work together despite differences.

Having a Unity Statement and a Code of Conduct in its earliest possible stage of their Coalition life already sets the agenda for action and the general ground rules for working together. For the EcoWaste Coalition, the Unity Statement was the reason-for-being of the Alliance, steered by a competent Secretariat and a Steering Committee or a Board for guidance and direction-setting. While many groups like EcoWaste start as an informal, loose group, as the Alliance expands and the workload grows, structures and systems are developed, and rules are established to maximize available resources while ensuring a smooth workflow and relationship with members. Each Alliance is unique, therefore the policies they think are relevant and needed to be institutionalized are determined by its members.

### 4. Alliances need to create spaces for meaningful and sustained membership-engagement.

Members’ voices count. While EcoWaste’s operations have been, generally, Secretariat-led for most of its history, the establishment of regional hubs in the last few years has encouraged a tighter, more energized engagement by local members. With the formalization of regional planning meetings, members are able to take ownership because they feel that they are given the space to air their views, contribute to a bigger national plan and sometimes to a global plan, and at the same time, gaining knowledge, skills, and political power in the local campaigns or work that they do.

“A problem shared is a problem halved.” This is what alliance-building is all about. It means establishing close relations with others to make the most of strengths and opportunities, and together, address weaknesses and

<sup>26</sup>Rei Panaligan during the Zoom call organized by GAIA. June 24, 2022.

<sup>27</sup>011422 Key Highlights..EWC Formative Strategy Assessment.



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