



BUSINESS UNUSUAL

ENTERPRISES PAVING THE WAY
TO ZERO WASTE





BUSINESS UNUSUAL: Enterprises Paving the Way to Zero Waste

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GAIA is a global network of more than 800 grassroots groups, networks, NGOs, and individuals. We envision a just, Zero Waste world built on respect for ecological limits and community rights, where people are free from the burden of toxic pollution, and resources are sustainably conserved, not burned or dumped. We work to catalyze a global shift towards ecological and environmental justice by strengthening grassroots social movements that advance solutions to waste and pollution.

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INTRODUCTION

Evolving Benchmarks for Zero Waste Businesses in Asia Pacific

EDEL S. GARINGAN

Getting into business is no walk in the park. It takes more than just putting your product in the market and expecting people to buy it. It is even harder if your business involves confronting culture, systems, and lifestyles—the very concerns of Zero Waste stores in Asia Pacific, especially during these days where convenience rules the day. These businesses—thriving even during the pandemic—are disrupting the unsustainable use of plastics and rediscovering Zero Waste ways to offer consumer products.

We interviewed 21 enterprises in Asia Pacific. From the neighborhood grocery store in Petaling Jaya in Malaysia to the surplus food delivery system in Australia, each store has an inspiring story to tell that goes beyond profit. The best part is—they are also growing!

The reemergence of Zero Waste stores in the region is more than just a welcome development; it is a big leap for businesses in reimagining the way materials and products circulate in a more sustainable way. The successful stories we featured in this book present the following beautiful possibilities for aspiring entrepreneurs in adapting Zero Waste as a driving force for their business—an approach that:

...prioritizes its mission for the environment and the communities

What separates a Zero Waste store from other business ventures is its clear mission to help address plastic pollution and mitigate its impact to people and the environment. In Sri Lanka, for example, the tragedy of the 2017 trashslide in the Meethotamulla dumpsite has greatly moved businesswoman Udara Rathnayake to put solutions into



action by setting a Zero Waste store for organic food and other household items. This is the same model for NUDE, a Zero Waste store in Malaysia that provides an array of products to its consumers without the unnecessary plastic packaging. NUDE also offers its consumers the choice of paying for items based on the amount they only need rather than buying them in predetermined sizes, weights, or containers.

...promotes sustainable lifestyle through creative marketing and education

Guided by their mission for sustainability, Zero Waste stores are proactively communicating their solutions to target consumers and the general public, thus raising public awareness on the issue and inspiring behavioral change. Slowood in HongKong, for example, utilizes its social media platforms to squeeze in Zero Waste content between product promotions.

And while they recognize that developing positive behavior towards Zero Waste is a long process, Zero Waste stores are trying different means to draw people in. From time to time, the 7 to 9 Greenstore in Kerala, India, distribute product samples for consumers to see for themselves that these items are as good as—or even better than—branded products.



...supports small producers and the local economy

Most Zero Waste stores, especially those that are acting as consolidators of products, prefer to engage with small producers and community-based social enterprises because for one, they have more flexibility to adapt Zero Waste in their businesses. They are doing this as a conscious effort to help the small business sectors and provide extra income for them. For example, Mother Earth Foundation's JuanaZero sources recycled paper accessories from women artisans in their project sites. A lot of Zero Waste stores are also working directly with small farmers and other producers, procuring products at fair prices, and selling them sans plastic packaging.

...tries to integrate Zero Waste principles across the value chain

Zero Waste stores are about more than veering away from plastic bags and shifting to eco-bags. More importantly, they adopt Zero Waste principles in their value chains, from source materials close to actual production,

to product delivery. Refillables Hoi An in Vietnam, for instance, ensures that their suppliers understand how plastic-free delivery systems can work in a tourist destination like Hoi An. Meanwhile, barePack in Singapore has successfully convinced restaurants that there is a conscious local market that prefers reusable containers for their takeout and food deliveries. These are just a few examples of unique approaches that engage different stakeholders in their value chain—the producer, the middleman, and the consumers—in the Zero Waste system.

Many think that Zero Waste stores are the emerging market of our time. In reality, they are a thing of the past that we should not have left behind in the first place. The models that we are seeing now have already existed before. They are simply being adapted with some modifications to suit our current contexts. While the past is “past” as we say, today, we have the right opportunity to create more business models that are more attuned to the sustainable future that we all dream of and deserve.





SIERREZA

Connecting with People

SALVE CANALE

“**T**hey now have hope, have higher self-esteem, and they have developed confidence. They used not to have dreams for themselves, now they do,” Che Abrigo said about the indigenous farmers in the mountainous parts of the provinces of Rizal and Tarlac in the Philippines who inspired the livelihood initiative she started in 2016 and are now their partners.

Che said that the first time she visited these communities, she observed the hopelessness in the people, and the low regard they had of themselves. “They told me: ‘We’re just indigenous peoples, we don’t know much, we didn’t finish school, we don’t even know how to read.’ They felt they were the lowest of people, because that’s how they have been treated for the longest time. So when I explained to them about the project, that what we were doing was not business and that it was not for me but for them, they were skeptical. They were skeptical because they have been told the same thing many times before, yet at the end of the project, of the funding, their lives remained the same,” Che shared.

Che was keen on making a difference. A long-time NGO volunteer before she embarked on her own advocacy of helping farmers, Che had seen how some programs were not

sustainable. “There were outreach activities. In fact, a lot of outreach activities. Some were just about dole-outs, which did not really improve the lives of the people,” she said.

Che initially secured a small grant to conduct organic farming training in these communities. But training was only the beginning. She wanted a sustainable livelihood for her partner farmers. So in 2018, Che established her own store, Sierreza Zero Waste Store and Artisan Café.

The goal was to help farmers in marketing their produce by bringing their products to the city the Zero Waste way sans the exploitative ways of typical traders. “Together, we set a fair price at the start: something that would give them income. The good thing about that is that they did not need to overproduce because even if they produce less, the price would still be competitive,” Che, who used to drive long hours to the communities and do the heavy work on her own, said.

THE ZERO WASTE STORE, CAFÉ AND TALIPAPA

Growing up, Che used to collect pieces of garbage strewn on the streets—a habit she picked up from her father who, as a



FARMERS AND COMMUNITIES SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

Like any other enterprise, Sierreza was also impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. For Sierreza, it meant giving up the main establishment and café and switching to a mobile store, delivering fresh farm products and some of Sierreza's processed items (e.g., dehydrated produce) to their customers directly.

"Flexibility and adaptability are the keys to survive," Che said. "It's not the size, nor the revenue of a company. It's your ability to adjust to the situation."

During the pandemic, with many people unable to go out and do their groceries, people realized the importance of agriculture and safe food. During this time, the Sierreza model—mobile market—became crucial. Che's once-a-week trip to the farming communities to get supplies doubled, resulting in better income for the farmers. "The farmers can stop planting if they want to. They produce their own food. They will survive. But they chose to continue planting for those who are in urban areas and cannot go out of their houses," Che said. "The farmers kept on supporting us. And they kept us alive."

young man, worked as a garbage collector to pay for his living expenses and subsidize his own schooling. Her father taught her the value of recycling and reusing things and minimizing waste. It therefore does not come as a surprise that Che decided that her enterprise be Zero Waste. "I tried to connect the advocacy of helping farmers and raising awareness on the impacts of waste on the environment," she said.

This is the reason, Che shared, that they reduce, or where not possible, minimize waste from every aspect of the operation—from the production of food up to bringing that food in whatever form: whether fresh produce, ready-to-eat food, processed food—to the consumer's table. The whole process, the whole being of Sierreza, she underscored, is Zero Waste.

On the customers' side, the team was able to service many senior citizens—bringing their orders right to their doorsteps. And as with the farmers, the buyers of the produce also became like family to the Sierreza team.

"We connect with the customers at the personal level. We don't see them as mere customers, we see and treat them as fellow human beings," said Che. "Whoever becomes a part of the Sierreza team, it's important that that person has a heart. Skills can be learned, but the heart to help others can never be replaced."

<https://web.facebook.com/Sierreza>

<https://www.instagram.com/sierreza/>



BAREPACK

Building a Reusables Ecosystem

MARLET SALAZAR

Coming from a career in fashion and graphic design, Roxane Uzureau introduced in 2019 a novel food delivery idea—a membership-based service wherein customers can order their food in reusable containers using an app.

Wanting to embrace the local culture but struggling with the disposable packaging and vast amount of waste from the takeaway culture, Roxane realized that if she were to tackle one aspect first, it had to be food. Hence, she founded barePack.

“I have always been quite sensitive to the notion of waste,” she said. “It’s something that genuinely upsets me. Everything has an environmental cost, even what you consider free.”

The idea of membership-based service has been going around for years, but an app- and membership-based service that works across many delivery platforms is novel, making Singapore the world’s first to have a solution cater for all its major delivery platforms—Foodpanda, Deliveroo, and Grab.

“There is an unmet need for those who don’t want to sacrifice the environment (and their health) for convenience,” Roxane explained.

The positive response from consumers encouraged Roxane to keep going.

Roxane’s biggest challenge has been changing the mindset of restaurant owners, especially those that have been in business for a long time.

“We had to convince restaurants that we had a solution that would work,” she said. “It was so different and novel. We had first adopters who we leveraged for social proof to get others who are less keen on board, and even big chains that typically would be averse to changing their operations.”

Roxane said the service is free for the businesses because the consumers, who are the members, are the ones paying for it, but they had to prove to restaurant owners that they could implement barePack without repercussions on their operations and that it would answer the needs of increasingly conscious consumers whose top complaint, according to restaurant owners barePack spoke with, pertains to unsustainable packaging.

To spread the word and raise awareness of the service, Roxane said that they did a fair bit of marketing and communications work for the businesses—all at no cost—to show that they were ready to put in all the effort needed to convert customers and make it a fruitful collaboration.

But businesses have a bottom line to protect which prevented them from embracing sustainable operations.

Adoption rates improved when the company introduced the rewards system and entered into partnerships. Finding like-minded entrepreneurs had been hard but barePack eventually found businesses that are willing to try something new.

Culture and beliefs are also some of the challenges barePack have to contend with. Some people feel that reusables are less hygienic than single-use containers. But Roxane argues customers cannot be too sure that single-use is cleaner than reusables.

“The WHO (World Health Organization) states that the best way to protect yourself from diseases is to wash your hands and surfaces with soap and water,” she said. “As such, reusable containers like ours that are cleaned by restaurants are almost guaranteed to be clean. Can you say as much about the single-use container?”





The COVID-19 pandemic that forced governments to impose lockdowns to curb the spread of the virus allowed barePack to promote their novel idea. Locked in their houses, people resorted to deliveries which significantly increased packaging waste. During the circuit-breaker months in Singapore, where Roxane and barePack are based, she realized that she needed to collaborate with the delivery service companies Foodpanda and Deliveroo.

“Bring-your-own schemes were halted in many restaurants because of the risk of contamination from accepting to handle customer containers but barePack doesn’t require taking in a container from a consumer by a food handler and as such we maintain our service in almost every single location,” Roxane said.

According to Roxane, the collaborations with Foodpanda and Deliveroo—and the newest to come onboard: Grab—were pivotal in getting more visibility and buy-in from restaurants and consumers alike.

Seeing at the start of the pandemic that they had less food traffic, they upped their ability to offer food delivery in barePack containers.

“With Deliveroo, we offered a deposit mode for customers who did not want to become members yet and made it free for the members to use the service during COVID-19,” she said. “Since then, we have resumed pricing but kept a monthly free trial period and then a low 99 cents/month membership. We did more education on the safety of reuse versus disposables to really show how there is no science to back the safety of single-use and to crush that perception. We added over twice as many restaurants to be more accessible during the COVID period alone, moving from just 30 locations to over 80 and now over 100.”

Roxane said that they are guided by their mission of replacing the millions of disposables used every day in food and beverage takeaway and delivery.

“We want to empower consumers to change their habits for a healthier and more sustainable life without having to give up on the things they enjoy such as food on the go and late-night delivery,” she said. “We believe in kindness: to each other, the planet, our partners, our customers.”

<http://www.barepack.co/>

<https://web.facebook.com/barePack.co/>

<https://www.instagram.com/barepack.co/>



AMGU

A Small Step for Zero Waste

FRAMELIA ANONAS

“Little steps will go a long way.” This is what Rangi Jory Madarang, or simply Ranj, always reminds herself as she and her business partner Ivy Jane Sumabong strive to influence people with their Zero Waste advocacy through their store called Amgu located in Cebu City, Philippines.

In this generation that lived alongside multi-packaged products, Ranj shared that the biggest challenge is getting the Zero Waste concept accepted. “Consumers are used to buying plastic packaged products, and here we are, encouraging everybody to try their best in living Zero Waste,” she said.

Zero Waste is the store’s main advocacy twinned with its main products which are mostly organic. But what makes Amgu click is its concept which is close to the heart of most Filipinos who are used to buying products in sachets for their weekly needs and budget.

“We do refills. When you buy something, you just fill your container or buy the quantity that you need,” Ranj explained. “We wanted to give convenience to those who want to buy organic products without worrying on spending a lot,” she added.

Indeed, Amgu’s clients constantly go back to the store for their refills on household products, personal care, and eco-friendly products.

AWARENESS ON BOARD

Amgu in Cebuano means ‘awareness’ and Ranj is happy to note that the store is indeed living up to its name. “Amgu’s largest consumers are people who are aware of how plastic is affecting the environment,” she said.

Ranj related that the people’s response to Amgu has been great. Sometimes people with no inkling of Zero Waste visit the store and come out with a working knowledge on the concept.

“They are amazed with all the things they learn in the store, and then they come back and become our regulars,” she happily shared. “It’s fulfilling to see repeat customers doing their groceries here, and bringing their own eco-bags and containers.”

Ranj and Ivy won’t get tired educating their customers on the store’s purpose, what it is fighting for, and who will benefit from it. “We need everybody to understand that the business stands for a sole purpose: make this planet a better and cleaner place to live in. In fact, a team of Grades 4 to 6 pupils were the very

first group of students who visited the store. "They were part of our Urban Backpacking Challenge who were tasked to do problem solving using our refills. We did a small talk on sustainability, showed plastic-free products, and taught them how a small step in saving the planet goes a long way," Ranj shared.

PANDEMIC WOES AND LESSONS

COVID-19 brought in difficult challenges that Ranj and Ivy had to overcome. Eco bags ran out as suppliers stopped operation, but this did not deter them.

"We decided to post on social media that we needed paper bags for our packaging. Then the next day, donations came in and soon we had over a hundred paper bags, bottles, and jars that we could use for packaging," she shared.

The pandemic brought in precious lessons for the Amgu owners. Foremost, they realized the need to have contingency planning for business continuity.

"In situations like the Covid pandemic, one should look for ways to make sure that the business stays afloat," she said. "To keep the business running despite limited consumer visits, we offered delivery as an option."

Creativity and being able to turn things around are two important things that Ranj also learned. Sourcing some products became a challenge, mainly because of border restrictions, so they learned to produce some products on their own.

Perseverance and resilience are also gems. "Everybody is struggling, but you just need to keep going. Stand up and take that single step to continue where you left off," she advised.

Because of the shortage of supplies during the pandemic, Ranj joined training on making personal care products like soaps, toothpaste/toothpowder, serums, body oils, and others.

"Because the focus was on Zero Waste, the sessions taught me how to pitch these products so consumers would just buy in refills and stop buying new ones with attractive packaging that would just end up being thrown away," she said.



For the next five to 10 years, Ranj envisions herself still making their own products and teaching communities on how to live sustainably. "I will continue to show them that there are many ways to lessen our waste," she said, adding that she would also love to see more Amgu stores around Cebu and the neighboring islands.

"Nature is greatly affected by our actions," she said. "If we continue to patronize products that are harmful to the environment, it's going to be us who will suffer."

www.facebook.com/amgu.cebu

www.instagram.com/amgu.cebu





SLOWOOD

One Zero Waste Step at a Time

MARGAUX ORTIZ-FABREAG

The seed was first planted in a rural village in New Zealand, where Slowood founders Dora Lam and Kai Chan had stayed during a trip there. In that small village, they experienced firsthand how to live with nature harmoniously and to practice sustainable living—a concept which had initially astonished them.

“New Zealand’s supermarkets sell vast amounts of organic and package-free goods, which fascinated Dora and Kai,” said Peggy Liu of Slowood’s Marketing Team.

But it was in Hong Kong that the seed grew, eventually becoming a full-blown Zero Waste advocacy.

“When Dora was pregnant, she tried seeking environmentally friendly products for her family. But in Hong Kong, eco-shopping is never easy as you need to visit different places to gather what you need,” Peggy said.

Dora and Kai then decided to start their own Zero Waste store that aimed to provide a wide range of products in one place. Slowood offers bulk food, refills of household and personal care products, organic vegetables, and fruits sans packaging, organic beauty and skincare products, slow fashion, and sustainable lifestyle and homeware.

“Bulk food and household refills have shown good performance, while skincare and herbal supplements are also popular and receive good reviews,” Peggy said, adding that Slowood finds ways to keep its prices friendly for customers by putting a lot of effort in sourcing products around the world.

The Slowood team has also made sure to make their special place more welcoming to people who are new to the Zero Waste concept.

“We are not only focusing on eco-conscious people; we would like to invite people who are less eco-conscious to join this Zero Waste movement,” Peggy stressed, explaining that they want to provide a gentler option for people who are not aware of sustainability yet or are reluctant to change their behavior.

She explained that Slowood is learning with its customers and trying to forge their consumption habits by selling bulk and refills.

“They could start their sustainable journey with Slowood step by step,” Peggy said.

Slowood’s business quickly expanded in just two years of operation: from a small team of 10 in 2018 to 50 staff manning two stores offering delivery services. Slowood opened their third store in December 2020.

This, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected businesses—big and small—around the world.

Peggy said their prior focus on their online operations helped them face the challenges brought about by the unprecedented global health crisis.

“Digital transformation in the retail industry has never been this fast. We have been developing our online outlet even before the pandemic so we are on track,” she said.



In addition, Slowood reviewed its operations and allocated more resources to online development to keep up with the pandemic-related developments.

Peggy said Slowood tried its best to reinforce the Zero Waste message during the lockdown, even providing out-of-the-box offers such as the “mealbox solution” which encourages their customers to bring their own meal boxes.

“The customers are happy to do it,” Peggy shared.

They also spread the Zero Waste word on their social media channels, frequently updating them with environmental facts, various product features, and other relevant news.

“The most challenging part (in this business) is to communicate the Zero Waste message not only to customers, but also to your suppliers and business partners,” Peggy said.

While admitting that it takes time to educate the public and raise community engagement on Zero Waste practices, the Slowood team is hopeful that digital solutions would continue to help bridge the gap.

“Nowadays, people are more educated and the flow of information is moving faster. We could read the news and see unusual climate changes from the other side of the world,” Peggy said.

She added: “We believe that there will be more and more people being informed and willing to live in a planet-friendly way in Hong Kong.”

<https://www.slowood.hk/>

<https://web.facebook.com/Slowood.hk>





WALA USIK

Zero Waste Sari-Sari Stores

BERYL TRANCO

Sari-sari or neighborhood stores are the go-to for most Filipinos for their daily necessities. By selling products in small quantities, sari-sari stores enable households with a meager income to purchase their needs for the day. Sadly, these neighborhood stores also serve as a major point of sale for problematic products. Most of the products sold in these stores are packaged in plastic sachets.

Inspired to empower existing sari-sari stores to transition to Zero Waste, the Philippine Reef and Rainforest Conservation Foundation, Inc. (PRRCFI) launched Bacolod City's first Zero Waste store, Wala Usik Tiangge + Kapehan, in January 2019. *Wala Usik* is a Hiligaynon phrase which means 'no wastage.'

Although it is a business, Wala Usik is considered a non-profit. The capital is from fund-raising and grants, and the income goes to the conservation and advocacy work of the Foundation.

The physical store was constructed using repurposed and recycled materials. Tables and shelves are made from crates and pallets. Bar stools are sourced from surplus shops. The chandelier and lamps are upcycled from scavenged wine bottles.

Inside the tiangge (store) are dispensers filled with liquid household laundry and dishwashing products, huge glass jars and barrels filled with different kinds of condiments and staples, personal care products, and reusable items.

According to PRRCFI Executive Director Dave Albao, one of the initial challenges they faced was how to dispense the products. "Big jars and containers are expensive. We had to fabricate and reconstruct mechanisms to refill products without contamination. Regulatory barriers have been an issue as well. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not allow refills of shampoo and cosmetics," he said.

But these initial roadblocks did not stop them from pursuing their vision. "We believe if nobody tries, studies, and tests, there is no step forward. So, we took the risk. Through our innovation laboratories, we conducted workshops to prototype, modify, and redesign [our store]," Dave said.

Wala Usik is a haven of local producers that attracts Zero Waste advocates, environmental activists, and socially aware citizens who regularly bring their own containers and bags to store their purchased products in. It also gathers local social enterprises with the philosophy of reducing the ecological footprint of importing foreign and unnecessarily packaged products.



Wala Usik also has a cafe that serves various local coffees, pastries (made by Bacolod-based foundations), and snacks from consignor community organizations. It also serves as a co-working space for collaborations with other environmental advocate groups. The cafe has been a venue for several Wala Usik workshops.

WALA USIK IN THE BARANGAYS

To bring Wala Usik to other places, PRRCFI held a Wala Usik Sari-Sari Store Design Workshop in February 2019 in Sipalay City, Negros Occidental to engage *sari-sari* store owners and other key stakeholders in designing and producing prototypes of the stores. Participants included artists, retail and industrial designers, LGU personnel, business consultants, and *sari-sari* store owners selected from SWEEP (Sea Waste Education to Eradicate Plastic) project barangays.

The first partner Wala Usik Sari-Sari store in Negros Occidental was launched in April 2019. Today, there are eight Wala Usik Sari-Sari stores in Negros Occidental: one each in the cities of Bacolod, Sipalay and Bayawan and the municipalities of Cauayan, Hinoba-an, Sta Catalina, Basay, and Siaton.

The owners determined the products they wanted to sell based on the interest of the consumers in their own communities. Sachets have been replaced with micro-refilling stations. A kilo of rice is put in a reusable container instead of a plastic bag. Cooking oil, vinegar, and other condiments are dispensed using reusable or repurposed containers, in incremental volumes and price points similar to products in sachets, but without the single-use packaging. The store owners lend containers to the customers, who then return them every time they go back to buy something, or when they bring their own containers to use to refill.

COVID-19 AND THE NEW NORMAL

Like other businesses, Wala Usik also suffered challenges due to the pandemic, forcing the management to close the physical store while redesigning its operation and transition into an online store.

"Most of the partner *sari-sari* stores are also adjusting their operations depending on quarantine and public health protocols. It will be interesting to see how these stores will evolve because of the pandemic," Dave stated.

Dave still hopes to re-open Wala Usik Tiangge when the situation improves. They are still committed to continuing the replication of the model, and to scale their learnings from this first cycle to expand their advocacy towards developing a small food forest. According to him, it is important to engage with the community despite the current situation of limited movement.

"The advocacy is still there. There are many ways to address the challenges of refilling in the communities. Wala Usik Tiangge + Kapehan and the *sari-sari* stores have paved and are paving a path for designing a refilling model that is safe, sustainable, accessible, and affordable for our communities," he said. "Imagine if 10% of *sari-sari* stores in the Philippines are wala usik, how much more ocean plastics we can prevent."

<https://www.facebook.com/walausik.tiangge/>
<https://www.instagram.com/walausik.tiangge/>





BRING ME HOME to the (Food) Rescue

JOHANNA POBLETE

In 2018, Bring Me Home (BMH) created an app allowing users to order discounted surplus food from cafés, restaurants, and other food outlets for pickup at a specified time near the end of business hours. Now, the Melbourne-based startup has the potential to become Australia's premier food rescue enterprise.

"Our mission is to reduce food waste by making surplus food accessible and affordable," said Jane Kou, founder and CEO of Bring Me Home. "A lot of the end-of-the-day food that might get chucked out if it's unsold—no one knows where to find it...so that's why we created the app."

The win-win scenario: people eat well, both consumers and food businesses save money, and the community of food rescuers avoids unnecessary food waste.

ORIGINS OF AN IMPACT STARTUP

The concept was born out of necessity. From 2016 to 2017, over 7.3 million tonnes of food waste was generated in Australia, based on the Australian government's National Food Waste Baseline Report. Much of the food waste came from households (34%) and "primary producers" (31%), including unharvested food that did not reach consumers, and perfectly edible food thrown away.

While taking up her master's degree at the University of Melbourne, Jane was also working for Too Good To Go—a European social enterprise fighting global food waste—which exposed her to the effectiveness of using a technology platform to manage surplus food. When Too Good To Go pulled out of Australia, Jane got the blessing of her former bosses to start a homegrown version. "I believed in the concept. I just didn't want to let it go," she recalled.

Jane spoke with hundreds of café and restaurant owners and validated that each establishment binned a weekly average of more than 100 kilograms of food waste—over half of which could have been saved. “I was very motivated to tackle the food waste problem in the retail sector,” she said. She bootstrapped funds to create a minimum viable product, and launched the BMH App.

GAINS AND LOSSES DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

BMH earned public trust by proving that the business model works. Consumers—budget-conscious and eco-conscious university students and early-stage white-collar workers—regularly availed of discounts ranging from 30% to 70%, without sacrificing food quality. Partner venues enjoyed foot traffic during traditionally slow hours, earning extra revenue while minimizing their food waste (as much as AU\$800 per month from sold leftover food). Through social media, BMH also fostered a sense of community among customers embarking on a Zero Waste lifestyle.

By 2019, BMH had raised AU\$720,000 for further app development and market expansion. Coverage expanded to Sydney in February 2020, peaking at around 180 partner venues in the central business district and inner suburbs. “We were skyrocketing from January to February. March was the best month we’ve ever had,” Jane shared.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this growth trajectory. By end-March, Australia had transitioned into a full shutdown, with non-essential business activities curtailed and people urged to stay at home. Consumer behavior altered, as work from home meant more people cooked rather than ordered takeaway. App downloads dwindled and users numbered only 31,700 by October. Around 40% of Bring Me Home’s partner venues either sold out or temporarily closed. “It was a wake-up call that BMH App is not COVID-proof; it actually has the highest impact,” Jane said.

PIVOTING TOWARDS RECOVERY

Jane and her team soon realized that food waste had been pushed upstream to the farmers and wholesalers. “We started looking into solutions that we can tackle right now in that space,” she said.

They pivoted with a subscription box service, dubbed Bring Me Home Box, to deliver local, in-season produce and restaurant-quality meats direct to the consumer. Choices include all-vegetable, all-fruit, or a mixed variety for the produce boxes; and variations in size (a small box feeds two people, whereas a large box feeds six people) for the protein boxes. The consumer may also choose subscription frequency and delivery dates.

“People seem to love [the mystery box concept]...and when they get something that they’re unfamiliar with, they just go online and look up recipes,” Jane shared.

With this new service, BMH widened their demographic to include consumers in their mid-20s to mid-50s. By expanding from downstream to upstream food waste recovery, they also doubled their achievements over the past year. In 2019, BMH App saved 8,350 meals and rescued 3.8 tonnes of food waste. In 2020, after concluding four months of pilot-testing in September, BMH Box saved 1,150 boxes or effectively diverted 6 tonnes of food from the landfill.

Moving forward, the team has a revival plan and will be launching the BMH App in Brisbane. “Bring Me Home is now COVID-proof. But without diversifying our revenue stream, we would still be stuck at the low bottom right now,” Jane said. “Being an eco-conscious and impact-driven brand, it gives us an edge when it comes to acquiring customers because they love the concept, the product, and our mission. I don’t think there’s a reason why we can’t continue to break through to a post-COVID world. If anything, it has made us stronger.”

<https://www.bringmehome.com.au/>

<https://web.facebook.com/bringmehome.au>

<https://www.instagram.com/bringmehome.au/>





JUANAZERO

The Community's Zero Waste Hero

MARGAUX ORTIZ-FABREAG

While it has been said that imitation is the best form of flattery, JuanaZero's Mary Grace Draper sees replication as the best manifestation of victory.

Mary Grace knew that JuanaZero, the Zero Waste shop of Mother Earth Foundation (MEF), was one step closer to achieving its goal of making more people embrace a Zero Waste lifestyle when a local *sari-sari* store owner started adopting their Zero Waste business practices.

"The store owner has replicated our refilling system in selling fish sauce, vinegar, soy sauce, and cooking oil," Mary Grace said in Filipino. The *sari-sari* store's customers are now required to bring empty containers when purchasing these condiments.

Mary Grace, who is assigned to oversee JuanaZero's branch in Malabon City, Philippines, explained that aside from enabling both reseller and customer to save on costs by avoiding

single-use plastic, JuanaZero passes on even more savings by purchasing and selling products manufactured in the city and nearby Navotas City.

Since opening its doors in September 2020, the store has been attracting more and more customers, according to Mary Grace. On the average, around five or six people bringing ecobags drop by their shop each day to purchase goods that they would consume for one or two weeks.

"It has only been a few months since we opened following the lifting of the strict COVID-related quarantines," Mary Grace said. "We are hopeful that more people from our community will be convinced to go Zero Waste."

Maricon Alvarez, program manager at MEF, explained that the initiative hopes to provide better alternatives to plastic products by selling metal cutleries, glass and metal straws,



stainless cups, and other reusable items.

JuanaZero also offers household essentials such as detergent powder, dishwashing liquid, and rice grains in addition to popular Filipino condiments.

“Our goal is a sustainable and Zero Waste community where people have access to affordable yet eco-friendly products for their basic needs,” Maricon explained.

JuanaZero aims to achieve this goal by promoting and offering an alternative and accessible Zero Waste store in the community that is also supportive of the local economy.

“It is really a dream, a goal, and a part of the advocacy of MEF as an organization to offer this Zero Waste store especially in our project sites where we still see residual wastes composed of single-use plastics, despite the communities’ awareness of

the importance of segregation,” Maricon said. She explained that an important part of the program is to establish an alternative delivery system that offers eco-friendly and reasonably priced products.

What makes JuanaZero different from other stores embracing the Zero Waste concept, according to Maricon, is its target audience. Instead of catering to the usual middle- to high-income market, JuanaZero targets the members of the local community.

“We first started convincing our waste workers to patronize the shop,” Maricon said. The team also drafted basic educational materials explaining to the community how they would actually be able to save on costs when they choose to buy from the JuanaZero store.

One such material detailed that customers could purchase a liter of cooking oil for only P80, as opposed to buying *tingi tingi* or small batches for P5 or P10 per plastic bag that could add up to P120 a liter.

“Their savings are considerable when they bring reusable containers in purchasing liquid essentials such as cooking oil, fabric conditioner, dishwashing liquid, and condiments,” Mary Grace explained.

More importantly, the community undergoes a paradigm shift as regards the concept of Zero Waste. They have learned to purchase several kilos of rice with their reusable eco-bags instead of buying three separate kilos of rice for each meal of the day. This wasteful practice usually involves the unnecessary use of a plastic bag for each purchase.

JuanaZero also serves another noble purpose: all its proceeds go to MEF’s Waste Workers’ Scholarship Fund, according to Maricon.

“We seek to help the unsung heroes of Zero Waste by providing scholarships and financing their children’s education expenses,” she said.

She added that the store’s profits also financed two of the foundation’s projects that assisted communities during the COVID-19 lockdown: a community kitchen called *Kusina ni Juan*, and the distribution of Zero Waste kits that contained reusable face masks and gloves, vitamins, and vegetables.

Maricon shared that they are planning to expand their operations and are currently on the lookout for new products to offer. They hope that these products can compete in the market and more importantly, underscore the true meaning of Zero Waste as a concept and advocacy.

Maricon and her team are now promoting JuanaZero on social media platforms, with their partner Zero Waste communities, and through participation in caravans and exhibits.

“We are aiming for JuanaZero to have its own brand to help more waste workers,” she said.

<https://facebook.com/JuanaZeroMEF>



7 TO 9 GREEN STORE

Transforming Shoppers

BERYL TRANCO

A leisure trip to London in 2016 introduced Bittu John Kalungal, an MTech Aeronautical Engineering graduate, to the concept of bring-your-own-container shopping.

He was convinced of the concept, that on his return home in Kolenchery, Kerala, India, he left his job and converted their family's 40-year-old grocery store into a Zero Waste store. Called 7 to 9 Green Store, the grocery now sells products without plastic packaging.

"It took nearly one and a half years to transition my father's old grocery store into Zero Waste," Bittu said. "Setting up the store is quite expensive; all containers are manufactured and imported outside India. However, since it was already an established grocery store, it was easier to get sufficient supply of products."

The conversion came with another challenge: shifting the customers' preference for particular brands over unbranded products. "We gave samples. Customers gradually liked and started buying items our store offers. Most of these are fresh, natural, eco-friendly, and home-made without any preservatives or artificial colors," Bittu emphasized.

Inside the 500-square-foot store are rows of containers of biodegradable and chemical-free products such as hand washers, dishwashers, soaps, bamboo toothbrushes, and toothpaste in tablet forms. Another attraction is the organic corner where vegetables are sold loose so that consumers can purchase the quantity they desire at a cheaper price.

"It is the quality of the products that attract people from different parts of Kerala. I have customers from Chengannur, Ernakulam, and Tripunithura who drive all the way just to buy things from my store," Bittu shared.

Bittu added that maintaining the products is not easy. "Shelf life is shorter than those in plastic packaging. For example, the shelf life of loose wheat powder is three weeks while packed items expire in nine months. So we should sell our products within a week. We convince our consumers by educating them about the consequences of plastic wastes."

According to Bittu, customers bringing their own containers or bottles get a discount of 2% every time they shop. If they don't have their own containers, they have the option to invest in organic cotton bags which they can use over and over for their grocery shopping. Glass bottles are also available for deposit. Customers can either keep the glass bottles or return them to the store and receive a full refund of their deposit.

Since its opening, the store has inspired changes in the way people shop, having shown them the impact of plastic-free shopping. Bittu shared that a faculty of a local school approached him, gladly saying that in the three months he has been purchasing in his store, he hasn't seen any plastic packets in his home.

Bittu also talked about a doctor who came to his store with his own container to refill sugar. "Another guy was in the shop. This guy watched the doctor refill his own containers, then came to me and asked me: 'Does he always come with his own containers?' That should be the change coming from everyone. From this incident, the guy realized it's not bad to bring containers from home and buy by refill. In our society, 20% of the people set the trend and the rest look up at these 20% and try to live like them. If we can change the attitude of the 20%, we can make a huge difference in our society."

7 to 9 Green Store has attained some fame through social media and news channels. Bittu shared that nearby stores are also now making efforts to avoid plastic packaging. They sell good quality cleaning solutions in loose form that are half the price of branded products. People refill their own bottles at a minimal cost.

"Lots of people are asking for franchises. We are working on that. In two years, nearly 500 people came to the store not to purchase but to express their interest in replicating the enterprise. I am giving all my support to them. Having Zero Waste shops in every place will make a huge difference. Imagine one single store can save 10 lakh (1 million) pieces of plastic in two years!" Bittu stated.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of walk-ins was reduced from 300 to 100 people. Their sales on nuts and dry fruits also dropped but other items were not affected. "We felt it is risky now for different people to touch the scoops in the bin. We changed the dynamics to promote safe shopping. Customers are not allowed to get into the store. They give a list and patiently wait outside while we pack every item they purchase," Bittu shared.

He added that they also started Zero Waste delivery where they bring their products to the customers' doorstep.

Today, the bring-your-own-container Bittu introduced to his community has changed his customers' mindsets and shopping habits. This makes him feel good about his decision to leave his engineering work. "I am getting the satisfaction which my engineering job failed to give me. As I have said, we have prevented the use of 10 lakh (1 million) pieces of plastic in two years. My town, Kolenchery is a remote town. I think there are nearly 40 grocery stores and five big supermarkets here. Can you imagine the amount of plastic coming out of each store every day?" he said.

He added: "If I just wanted to do business, I could simply sit with my father [in our old grocery store] and not make any risks. But I chose this one. I know I am doing something good for the environment and I am making money too," he said.

<https://7to9greenstore.com/>

<https://web.facebook.com/7-to-9-Green-Store-270203740286602/>

<https://www.instagram.com/7to9greenstore/>





OLD MANILA ECO-MARKET

Building Zero Waste Communities

SALVE CANALE

If you know your way around Intramuros, Manila, you have probably come across a pop-up market near the Manila Cathedral on a weekend. That's the Old Manila Eco Market (OMEM), a Zero Waste weekend market that showcases locally sourced products like fresh fruits and vegetables, food consumables, personal care products, and handicrafts.

It was a dream for Old Manila Eco Market founders Shine de Castro and Sheila Leyva to have a weekend market in Manila. They wanted to bring locals back to enjoying their own tourist attractions while experiencing a weekend market without having to endure the heavy traffic and travel for hours. They pitched the idea to the Intramuros Administration and since 2018, the pop-up store has been a constant part of the Walled City.

ZERO WASTE ALL THE WAY

As much as it is a business, the Old Manila Eco Market is also an initiative to promote eco-friendly lifestyles. As enthusiasts of pop-up stores, Shine and Sheila are fully aware that these spaces generate large amounts of waste, particularly disposables. So, it was a mutual decision to embrace Zero Waste from the beginning. That means strictly banning single-use plastics in all kinds of products, including ready-to-eat food, for their merchant partners. Thus, if a merchant applying to become a part of the weekend market cannot shift to reusable packaging, they tell them to reapply when they are ready to make the shift.



"It was challenging at the start," Shine admitted. "Manilans are new to the concept of Zero Waste and a local weekend market."

Shine said that most people are not even aware that shampoo bars and beeswax wraps existed. They are also very curious about how a refilling system works. People are also very surprised that locally and naturally made products can be purchased by anyone at relatively low prices. "We don't have a lot of customers yet but we just keep on keeping on and continue to spread awareness about Zero Waste and local alternatives."

MARKET DAY AND MORE

For Old Manila Eco Market, every market day is made special by every market goer who learns about Zero Waste through the products and services they are offering.

As Shine noted, being Zero Waste goes beyond substituting packaging and raising awareness. That's why they are determined to help their partners and consumers navigate the Zero Waste lifestyle not only by offering them eco-friendly products but also by facilitating training sessions that promote sustainable lifestyle. Some of these training are on solid waste management, urban farming, bokashi composting, recycling/upcycling, DIYs, sustainability summit, and similar topics—offered at a minimal cost.

To give their partners more platforms to showcase their products, OMEM collaborates with other institutions and organize pop-up markets in malls and schools, and in organizations' event venues.

"We work with our beneficiaries to make them a Zero Waste community and empower them financially," Shine said, adding that they often get invited by organizations to set up Zero Waste pop-up markets during events.

As with other businesses, OMEM also sometimes experiences difficulties. When things become difficult, Shine and Sheila would remind themselves of the reason why they started Old Manila Eco Market: to bring Zero Waste in one community at a time.

When the lockdowns were imposed in Metro Manila beginning March 2020, they were not able to organize green events and they had to temporarily stop operating their pop-up events, which was the main source of their income. Shine and Sheila used the time for reflection.

"We reflected on our business model, our plans for the coming years, and going back to basics," Shine shared. Presently, they are giving training on growing food in their own community. "The produce they grow will not only provide food on the table but could also be a source of additional income," Shine said.

She added: "We are not just a store and we are not here just to sell products and services. We are building a community, not only of brands, but also of other movers and shakers working together to achieve a more sustainable lifestyle. All these while also promoting the local tourism industry."

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GREENCARE

From the Family Farm to the Family Store

MARLET D. SALAZAR



It was a couple of advocacies that led to the founding of the family-owned GreenCare Organic store in Sri Lanka. The owners wanted to sell organic vegetables grown on their family's farm and promote the Zero Waste principle.

Udara Rathnayake, the co-founder of GreenCare, said that the store or supermarket which is based in Colombo is like a one-stop shop of organic produce and merchandise. Initially, the store sold organic vegetables that Udara's mother planted and harvested from their farm.

"My mother used to grow organic fruits and vegetables for our daily consumption when we were small. When we moved to Colombo for our higher studies, we missed our mother's produce and the healthy food she served," she said.

In 2017, the Meethotamulla garbage dump disaster happened, rocking Sri Lanka. Nineteen people, including five children, died and 40 homes were damaged when a 300-foot high pile of garbage shifted then collapsed following floods and a fire.

The tragedy compelled Udara to strengthen her drive to reduce single-use plastic.

"I was thinking: who was responsible for that tragedy?" she said. "Those people lost their lives because we threw away our plastics and garbage. I realized we need to find a solution to give justice to the people who died. Also, I wanted to make a difference."

GreenCare as a company is four years old and the store is two years old. Initially, Udara and her family would attend fairs to sell their produce. Realizing that there is a market for organic vegetables, she and her family established the store.

But GreenCare has very strict rules that customers should either bring their own reusable bags or the store can provide paper bags.

"After setting up the store, we thought of introducing the practice of Zero Waste and from day one, we only used paper bags," she said. "[Admittedly], we are not Zero Waste yet but this is more than 50% or more than 80% Zero Waste," she said.

Still, GreenCare strongly encourages—and educates—its customers to be extra mindful of the waste they generate. The store buys reusable bottles and other containers that could be used for edible products. The micro-businesses that sell their goods through GreenCare are not allowed to use any type of plastic in their packaging.

"When we discuss the concept and encourage them to try it, we give them a glass bottle and encourage them to bring it back," she explained. "We will pay a small amount if they bring the bottles back."

While there are still some who don't buy the idea of shifting to reusables, Udara said that the majority of their customer base is "more educated and more knowledgeable."

She admitted, though, that the goods sold in their store can be a bit expensive because their products are organic as well as homemade and small scale.

"Our products are from our own farms. We do not source from others because we want to make sure that the products are truly organic," Udara said.

She added that they have a different customer base. "These are those who allow you to reuse, those who can understand the concept, and those who are knowledgeable. Our target market is high-end, or those who have the buying power."

According to Udara, the store doesn't spend on any marketing. They rely on "a little bit of movement here or the word of mouth."

She added that she herself talks to people and introduces the GreenCare concept of organic farming and goods and reducing waste.



She explained: "We cannot think of the cost because it is the mindset as well as the behavior that we need to change."

Like other stores, the COVID-19 pandemic also affected the GreenCare store but Udara said that like everybody else, they needed to adapt and resorted to delivering their goods. The packaging is of utmost importance but they still don't allow plastics, especially single-use plastics.

In fact, according to Udara, they are looking at opening more stores. "Besides the fact that it is a good business, having more stores will allow us to educate more people about reducing waste and the health benefits of organic farming."

[f https://www.facebook.com/organicsupermarketgreencare/](https://www.facebook.com/organicsupermarketgreencare/)



WORKINGMUM

Empowering Period

BERYL FRANCO

Periods are challenging. Besides the menstrual cramps that some women experience during this time of the month, single-use napkins that many women use to maintain their hygiene are also polluting the environment.

But these disposable napkins are products of the modern world's fixation on convenience. Women just a few decades back used reusable cloth to maintain their hygiene without polluting the environment.

Cecille Guevarra, owner of Workingmum, has joined the growing businesses that give a nod to the sustainable ways of the past with her products—washable menstrual pads and pantyliners. Launched online in May 2018, Workingmum aimed to provide alternatives to disposable sanitary napkins.

Cecille is the tailor of her products. Originally from Occidental Mindoro and currently based in Sta. Cruz, Manila, she also subcontracts a seamstress from her province. "As I manage my own business, I am happy to provide livelihood to a single mother," Cecille said, proud of empowering a fellow woman.

"I used to have rashes and blisters wearing disposable napkins. I don't want my daughter to experience these discomforts," Cecille shared.

Cecille started sewing cloth pads for personal use in 2016. When her daughter started to have her period, she convinced her to use reusables which her daughter did.

"I have been in the reusable scene before I started selling my handmade pads," she said.

When Cecille launched her business, her first buyer was her best friend, whose mother died of cervical cancer. "My friend had her tissue analyzed to test any indication of the disorder. She was then advised to not use disposable sanitary pads. For a friendly price, she purchased her first set of cloth pads from me," Cecille said.

Cecille then linked up with other eco-warriors to resell her products. "I feel Workingmum is classy for having buyers from Makati and Bonifacio Global City," she said, referring to Philippine cities where the well-off live.

She added: "I am aware that more than just wanting to be trendy, the buyers share the advocacy of personal and environment care. I will not do the math anymore. I'm humbled for being an instrument in avoiding disposable pads on the minefield of plastics.

OPPORTUNITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

While the quarantines declared early in 2020 to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected many businesses and caused anxiety to many business owners, Cecille saw opportunity from the situation.

"People are forced to stay at home and have more time to go online. Thus, we received more messages for orders. It seemed these women had no other choice because most of the stores were closed," she said.

Since the lockdowns, another washable has been added to Workingmum's products—facemasks. "The stocked raw materials for cloth pads were turned to reusable face masks. We make quality face masks that sell for a reasonable price," Cecille said.

Due to limited access to resources, production is also limited. Cecille strategized the distribution and preferred not to sell in bulk. "However, there was an exemption. I had a buyer who requested to purchase in large quantities. I found out that she was donating the facemasks to frontliners," she shared.

MOVING FORWARD

According to Cecille, her business has been good for her family life. "The manufacturing of the washables has knitted the bond of my marriage. My husband is the 'master cutter' of the patterns," she said.

She added that the business also allowed her to discover some things about herself.

"I realized that I am an artist creating designs of my own products."

The designs and the materials of the washables, according to Cecille, evolved as time went by. "We discovered better types of clothes and upgraded our products. This may have added costs on our part but we didn't change our pricing. We ensure the quality to help keep women and girls feel comfortable while keeping conventional period products out of landfills," she shared.

She added: "I consider Workingmum as a small step to a Zero Waste lifestyle—a small step from each of the women who purchased from us. Our sales may be slow-paced at times yet it is consistent and I am not giving up on it."

<https://www.facebook.com/bengworkingmum/>
<https://www.instagram.com/clothpadslinerph/>



NUDE

the ZERO WASTE store



<https://nudezerowaste.com/>

<https://web.facebook.com/nudezerowaste/>

NUDE

Bare Essentials

JOHANNA POBLETE

NUDE, the Zero Waste Store in Seksyen 19, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia has reimagined the typical supermarket setting into a friendly neighborhood staple as a modern, minimalist, plastic-free zone, where one can find as many package-free items under one roof. Their motto: “Just the Good Stuff—Package Free, Harm Free, Guilt Free.”

Co-founders Cheryl Anne Low and Wilson Chin conceptualized NUDE as a lifestyle store catering to customers who care for the environment and want to minimize their plastic and food waste. Supplies are mainly sourced locally and come in bulk, reusable, and returnable packaging. Store products are sold by the gram and placed in refillable reusables for rent in-store or preferably brought by the customers themselves.

“[Our first proposition was] to give the consumers the choice to have everything they need without the unnecessary plastic packaging,” Cheryl said. “Secondly, we wanted the consumers to have the choice of buying as much or as little as they actually need, rather than having to buy predetermined sizes, weights, or packages [...because] how often have we found bags at the back of our fridge with food that has expired and had to be thrown out?”

POCKET-FRIENDLY PRACTICE

While Zero Waste stores are not new in Malaysia, most cater to a niche, premium market or have a limited product catalogue. When NUDE opened in 2018, they targeted the general populace and carried as many of the daily essentials as possible, ranging from Zero Waste lifestyle aids such as menstrual cups, bamboo toothbrushes, and solid toothpaste (“Moods”); to herbs and spices, handmade plain and vegetable pasta, homemade cookies, and local varieties of rice and coffee (“Foods”); to all-natural insect repellents, eco-friendly laundry detergents, and pet shampoo (“Goods”).

“We made it available at one single point—a one-stop Zero Waste shop, if you like—for all your daily needs,” Cheryl said.

The proprietors of NUDE make sure to extensively source quality products that can be sold at affordable price points, thus breaking the perception of Zero Waste being expensive and difficult to adopt.

“Our prices are comparable to, if not better than, supermarket prices, which helps our customers go Zero Waste without burning a hole in their pockets...The fact that you don’t need to buy pre-packaged quantities allows you to dictate exactly how much you need to consume and spend,” Cheryl said.

According to Cheryl, finding quality products that do not harm the earth at reasonable prices requires a lot of research and patience and discussing their advocacy with their suppliers. “Making the suppliers understand the reasons why we would like to buy package-free from them and coming up with workable realistic solutions for both parties is important,” she said, adding that to ensure the quality

of the products they carry, they go “into the detail of the ingredients and do research on each of the ingredients.”

NO CLUTCHING AT STRAWS

Plastic use is so pervasive that the average consumer rarely questions the amount of waste generated down the line to allow for a single-use purchase. This same consumer may be unconscious of how plastic, which takes decades to break down, usually overfills dumping grounds and pollutes the ocean.

The catalyst for Cheryl was seeing a video of a plastic straw being painstakingly removed from the nostril of a sea turtle. “Being a scuba diver, it affected me so much that it set me on a frenzy of fact-finding; why and how it could happen. That opened my eyes to what human activity is doing to the world and who suffers the most from it,” she said.

The journey to a Zero Waste lifestyle for Cheryl and her partners started with a refusal to use plastic and eventually led to launching NUDE, just so they could educate more people on the impact of single-use plastic. She considers their customers as “co-passengers” in this journey.

“Expect the unexpected,” says Cheryl, referring to the “back-breaking” labor of the past two years, including ensuring the safety of their customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. “We take their orders and sanitize and refill their containers for them. Before this, it was self-service, where customers were free to browse and make use of the weighing machines to refill their own containers with our guidance and assistance when they needed it.”

NUDE remains focused on servicing the needs of Zero Waste practitioners and aspirers alike, even as Malaysians become increasingly committed to the lifestyle. “We have seen a massive growth in awareness, as well as eagerness in people about consciously contributing towards the healing of the planet,” says Cheryl, recalling how, in 2018, they would teach children about the concept of Zero Waste store.

“Many children would pop in for biscuits and snacks, so we would teach them to bring their own containers. They would go home, tell their parents, and their curious parents would come visit us. Their praises for what we were doing, in teaching their children about the environment and how something like packaging can be harmful to marine life and animals, were always heartwarming. The parents appreciated what we were doing, and the kids came every day,” she shared.

Now the concept is not so novel, with more Zero Waste stores opening to cater to the burgeoning market. “It is a matter of time before this phenomenon really explodes and the consumers demand more and more Zero Waste options. Most definitely, this is the way of the future, sooner than later.”

LIPAY MUNDO

Time to #DoTheSwitch

BERYL FRANCO

After a year of waiting for someone else to open a Zero Waste store in Dumaguete City, Philippines, Eula Rae Libo-on turned her dream of owning a Zero Waste store into reality. Together with her two closest friends, she invested in something that could possibly impact her community and the future generations.

"I was not on Zero Waste at first, but as I learned more about environmental concerns, I also became alarmed. I decided to do the switch, hence the hashtag of Lipay Mundo is #DoTheSwitch," Eula shared.

The first Zero Waste store in the city had its soft opening in July 2019. "Lipay Mundo Co. aims to inspire the consumers and other businesses [about] the freedom of purchasing essentials without having to deal with the plastic packaging afterward," Eula said.

Lipay means happy in Bisaya, the local language used in Dumaguete, and *Mundo* is Spanish for 'world.' "With a mission to keep non-recyclables and non-compostables out of landfills, we partner with different local and foreign organizations and individuals in giving Dumaguete City access to a Zero Waste lifestyle," Eula shared.

PURCHASE ONLY AS MUCH AS YOU NEED

Located under the hotel stairs of Gabby's Bed and Breakfast, Lipay Mundo is a small grocery store selling natural and organic products without packaging. It offers a bulk foods section that contains different kinds of organic pasta, nuts, coffee beans, and moringa powder that comes in loose forms.

Also for sale are kitchen and household products such as edible and reusable straws, wooden and metal cutlery, beeswax food wrap sets, and reusable cups and food containers.





According to Eula, among the best sellers are the all-natural, non-toxic home cleaning and personal products. These are free of chemicals and toxins, therefore safe for every family member including babies.

"We make our own product brands using all-natural ingredients trusted by environmentalists and tested by chemists. We also carry other products sourced from individuals and brands with their own mission to create a positive environmental impact. We are proud to call them our friends and constant sources of inspiration," Eula said.

Customers are given the freedom to purchase as little or as much as they need from the store as they are encouraged to bring their own containers for product refill or to trade with bottles from the store. They also have the option to buy empty glass bottles at Php 10.00 to use as their own refillable containers.

OVERCOMING THE CHALLENGES

"The first challenge we had was the belief system—making other people believe that our Zero Waste concept works. We overcame this challenge through endurance and patience that comes with teaching others the whole value of the concept," Eula stated.

Eula shared that their first customers were foreigners and expatriates. "They were the ones who identified and understood the need, then eventually the locals followed. They now understand that the price point comes with the quality

and sustainability of the products—having to not throw them away in the landfills after they use them," she said.

Just like any other small enterprises, Lipay Mundo was also affected by COVID-19. The pandemic has brought out Eula's creativity and readiness to adapt to change quickly. Closing the store was a challenge, yet it doesn't mean the operations stopped.

"Since our physical store always smells good from the outside, people tend to come in and sniff everything they can get their hands on—which is taboo especially with the virus starting from the three entry points—eyes, nose, and mouth. We had to close the physical store indefinitely and stay online for now. We have to do more online advertising and apply a no-touch delivery concept where our riders deliver the orders to the customers without touching the deliveries," she said.

Managing a Zero Waste store is to live up to the Zero Waste concept. "It's not easy keeping up, but live up to it and see how the little Zero Waste things you do add up to the bigger picture. Start small, think big, scale fast," she said.

<https://www.facebook.com/lipaymundoco/>
https://lipay_mundo.com/



TOKO ORGANIS

From Research to Pioneering Zero Waste Store

SALVE CANALE

Bandung, Indonesia, home of the non-profit Yayasan Pengembangan Biosains dan Bioteknologi (YPBB), one of the pioneering Zero Waste organizations in Indonesia, is also home to Zero Waste stores. Refill centers, bulk stores, and organic stores dot the area. Pioneering of these stores is YPBB's very own, Toko Organik (organic shop).

Established in 2014, Toko Organik has been selling everyday products without relying on sachets and other single-use plastic packaging, long before Zero Waste became a buzzword in these parts of Indonesia.

Prior to launching the store, YPBB conducted a simple research on the waste generated by households in the community. They found that plastic sachets and other plastic packaging made up a significant fraction of inorganic household waste.

To address this, they thought of piloting a store that would sell basic needs without using plastic. They believed that if such a store existed, sachet consumers could make the switch. Hence, the birth of Toko Organik.

Toko Organis carries products that are available in the market, as well as environmentally friendly products produced by the community, such as organic bath soaps, loofahs, bamboo cutlery, bamboo coffee filters, reusable shopping bags, and so on. They also refill products that are usually bought in sachets ranging from detergents, clothing fragrances, shampoo, body wash, sauces, and snacks. Among their bestsellers are the *lerak* seeds (soapberry), known as a natural detergent.

Unlike typical Zero Waste stores criticized for being niche, Toko Organis is affordably priced. Their products are easy on the pocket—as though the consumers are buying in the conventional markets, but without the single-use plastics.

But while it is a store—and the pioneer Zero Waste store in Indonesia, no less—Toko Organis has no plans of expanding or opening other branches. “We want to become a part of a Zero Waste store collective or Zero Waste store alliance which we help organize and have a big impact on the climate of mainstream business,” said Muhammad Fatchurrahman, known to friends as Fatik, Business Developer at Toko Organis.

He explained: “YPBB is an organization that focuses on environmental issues, especially on waste problems. We know that there are many mainstream movements today, especially in business practice that already understand environmental issues. We want to be directly involved in this circle to participate in eliminating today’s wasteful business-as-usual practices and mainstreaming a more sustainable business model.”

Initiated as part of the YPBB Zero Waste lifestyle program, Toko Organis serves as a disruptive business model to promote a Zero Waste lifestyle. Aside from selling products, the store offers waste management tools to

help customers expand Zero Waste in their respective households. They have organic management tools like takakura composting box and biopore drills—used for making biopori holes for composting—as well as refill bins.

According to Fatik, Toko Organis is currently working on a toolkit on how to adopt Zero Waste principles in a business setting. The book discusses environmental issues and business practices 101. “Almost all of the YPBB program participants want to access our Zero Waste supporting tools to live a Zero Waste lifestyle. So, Toko Organis aims to facilitate this by making our Zero Waste products and methods accessible,” Fatik said.

Fatik shared that consumers who have visited their store have positively reacted to it. “They think that if there were more of us, they won’t need to worry about the amount of waste that they generate every time they shop,” he said.

Toko Organis was not spared of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. For two months, they had to close their physical shop. “In those two months, the management team tried to make adjustments in their online store to accommodate their customers. We continue to operate via delivery service,” Fatik said.

Toko Organis eventually reopened, putting in place all the necessary health protocols.

“The pandemic has shifted most of the activities online, so it provides opportunities for initiatives like Toko Organis and other bulk/Zero Waste stores in Indonesia to gain momentum and spread our impact even more,” Fatik said. “People are starting to see that this is a growing business, that there are better ways to shop.”

[f https://web.facebook.com/TokoOrganis1](https://web.facebook.com/TokoOrganis1)



CROFT BULK STORES

Living the Zero Waste-Vegan Lifestyle

FRAMELIA ANONAS

Sahara Lee Castel, owner of Croft Bulk Store, has been a vegan for a decade when she came across the Zero Waste lifestyle.

“Visiting Sydney in 2018, the Zero Waste bulk stores I frequented gave me the inspiration and ideas to bring such a concept to Davao City,” she said. At that time, she was also running a vegan restaurant called The Vegan Dinosaur and she realized that the restaurant was far from being Zero Waste.

Upon her return to the Philippines, she started the Croft Bulk Store whose twin advocacy of a Zero Waste and vegan lifestyle makes it a standout in Davao City.

Since then, her store and restaurant was able to marry the vegan and Zero Waste lifestyles, which clients took on. The store’s sleek layout and design gives customers that peaceful feel as they flip the lids up on containers to get the vegan products of their choice. The flip lid containers have somewhat become the store’s identity as other stores have been making use of jars or dispensers to display their wares.

Because their products are plastic free and come with no packaging, the customers are encouraged to bring their own containers or to use the provided paper bags to fill with products.

WHAT THEY SELL

Best sellers in the store are typically nuts, dried fruits, and seeds, but other products such as grains, pasta, flour, sugar, coconut products, cacao products, superfood powders, herbs, spices, teas, and others are also quite popular.

“Since the store is 100% vegan and leaning towards more wholesome food items, customers are typically those wanting to have a healthy diet,” Sahara said. This is the reason why they also keep the shelves well-stocked with



products rich in antioxidants, fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

Croft Bulk Store also features popular products such as bamboo toothbrushes, reusable straws, bags, soap bars, liquid soap, and bamboo cotton buds. Sahara and her staff are always on the lookout for products that are essential in a Zero Waste lifestyle.

Sahara shares that many of their customers come to the store because they can buy in any quantity—as little or as much—depending on their needs. They are also able to discover new products or search for products they have previously heard about from their customers that frequent their store.

“Overall, the store has been well-accepted and, through the help of our closely-related restaurants, continues to grow,” Sahara shared.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Sahara admitted that just like many new ventures, it will take time for the store to reach its full potential, given that it is a new



concept and many of its items are not as familiar to the public.

Another challenge is finding local suppliers and educating them on how the products should be delivered, particularly on eliminating all plastic materials in the transfer of goods.

And when the pandemic hit, it also brought in more challenges for the new shop. The travel restrictions affected the importation of goods and, for a few months, many of the main items sold in the store were not delivered. After the main lockdown, the store's stock was depleted and it took some time to build up the inventory back to its previous state.

Further, the restrictions in domestic and international travels, including restrictions of movements within the city, clipped the number of on-site customers.

"All of these factors have had a negative impact on the overall sales," Sahara admitted. "We just had to be patient and wait for some level of normalcy to resume in order to reorder the best-selling products. We also waited for the movement of people to resume until the footfalls eventually increased."

On educating their suppliers, Sahara and staff made sure that the suppliers are made aware of the store's advocacy. "We provided them with our own storage containers where they can place the items to be delivered to us," she shared. "This eliminated all plastic materials which were previously used in transferring the goods to us."

According to Sahara, the pandemic taught her to always be ready for the worst possible scenario. "Business owners like me can be optimistic and believe that our concepts will sell, but we must look at the possible negatives and have a backup plan for such events," she added.

Despite the challenges, Sahara remains optimistic about the future. She is looking forward to opening a third store in the next five years, possibly in Davao City or in another city in the Philippines.

<https://www.croftbulkfoods.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/croftbulkfoods/>

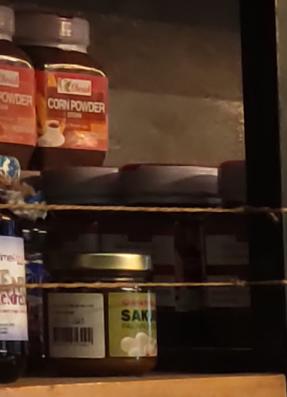
<https://www.instagram.com/croftbulkfoods/>

Empowering People

SNACK BITES

Empowering Culture

GOT HEART SHOP



GOT HEART SHOP

An Enterprise with a Heart

MARLET SALAZAR

Got Heart Shop has set its heart on helping micro-businesses and the indigenous peoples. A social enterprise that curates local food and non-food products from their partners, the shop does not only provide a venue for farmers to sell their products but also assists them in developing what it calls “businesses that are sustainable, holistic, independent, and dignified.”

Supporting a broad range of advocacies from using organic products to locally made produce, Got Heart Shop is also actively promoting Zero Waste.

Melissa Yeung-Yap founded the Got Heart Foundation in 2007, years after a visit to an orphanage where she realized there is a role she needed to play—to create a better world by empowering the marginalized sector and assisting them to live a life they can be proud of.

Working with different communities, the Foundation saw the struggles of micro-enterprises and understood that what prevented them from moving their businesses to the next level was in the area of sales and marketing. The communities had to resort to middlemen that undersold their products, thus losing the opportunity to increase their revenue.

Because of this, they decided to pool the resources of the Foundation together to put up their very own Got Heart Shop where they can sell their community’s quality products at a fair price that actually benefits the community.

In 2012, Melissa started Got Heart Shop with stores in White Plains (inside Earth Kitchen) and Esteban Abada, Loyola Heights, both along Katipunan, in Quezon City, Philippines. The shop also carries the Eat Your Straw’s Edible Straw and Earthlings brands that manufacture products like silicone menstrual cups, coffee cups, and dish sponges.

According to Melissa, Got Heart is one of the first stores that embraced Zero Waste in the country. Being a pioneer, one of their key challenges was figuring out how this type of social enterprise will be accepted and eventually flourish. Endless tria-and-errors while learning by doing helped them to keep it up and running. “We just kept innovating and iterating accordingly,” she said.

She added: “Buying these Zero Waste products will promote the triple Ps bottom line that Got Heart has been holding on for almost 12 years: the People, the Planet, and the Profit.”

Got Heart walks the talk. They eliminated any and all forms of packaging; hence, they do not produce so much residual waste.

Located in a neighborhood of mixed social classes, Got Heart caters to residents within the area as well as students from different campuses and workers from nearby offices.

However, as the pandemic accelerated digital transformation across all industries, the shop ramped up its online store and now engages its customers from different places through their social media platforms.

“Our customers have been very supportive,” Melissa said. “We have a lot of regular customers who are already aware of the Zero Waste drill such as bringing sanitized containers for refilling.”

Philippine businesses were heavily affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. And while Got Heart was also hit, the pandemic did not deter them from pursuing their advocacy. To help people practice their Zero Waste habit, they now offer delivery through couriers and/or delivery apps. They likewise expanded their operations by using an online platform. They use sterilized reusable containers to ship the products, especially the soaps, which are the best-seller.

“There are a lot of things you can’t control during a pandemic but just keep on working on the things you can control,” Melissa said.

According to Melissa, consistency and follow-throughs are what make “habits” like Zero Waste successful. For her, one has to be true to their objective, first and foremost, because it would help any social enterprise—or any business for that matter—to find its footing and become successful, however people define success. “We always do whatever we can to lessen any environmental impact of the products we sell,” she said.

<http://www.gotheartfoundation.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/GotHeartPH/>





ENVIU

Normalizing Sustainability

JOHANNA POBLETE

How do you create positive change and a more inclusive world? Start by supporting sustainable ventures, Anne Poggenpohl shared, a venture builder at Enviu. To date, Enviu has grown 18 world-changing companies in the Netherlands, Kenya, India, Chile, and Indonesia.

“When we founded Enviu in 2004, our dream was the same as it is today: an economy that serves people and the planet. An economy enriching the lives of all people, providing access to basic needs. An economy that sustainably utilizes the valuable and limited resources our planet endows,” Anne said.

To ease the transition into this equitable economy, Enviu leverages on strategic, synergistic partnerships and creates long-term entrepreneurial programs that disrupt value chains and drive industries toward a “new normal.”

“We determine what business interventions are needed along the value chain. We validate new, sustainable business models by creating, replicating, or accelerating ventures,” Anne said. “We use what’s already there and add what’s missing.”

RIDDING INDONESIA OF ITS PLASTIC WASTE PROBLEM

Enviu runs the Zero Waste Living Lab (ZWLL) program to tackle plastic pollution in Indonesia, the world’s second largest generator of marine litter. Each venture helps develop the market for Zero Waste consumption so that a truly sustainable lifestyle is possible.

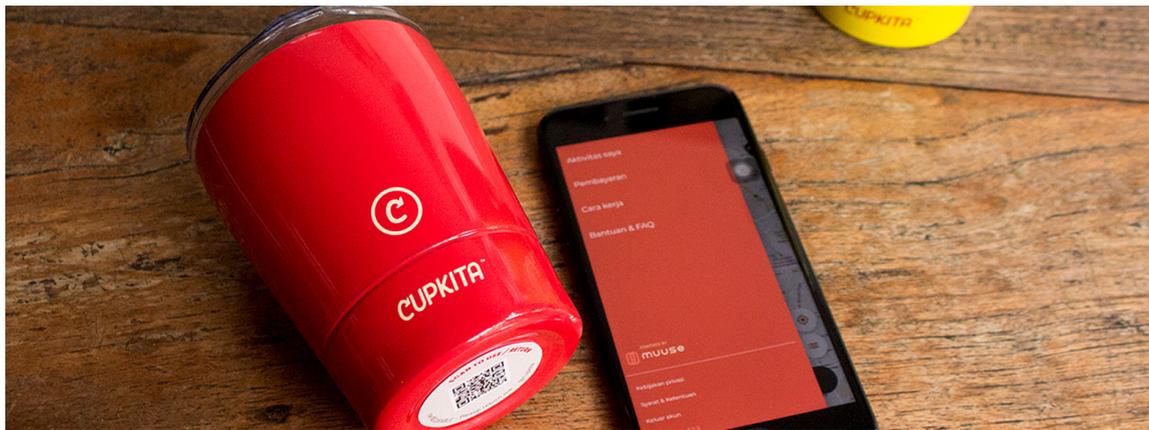
Koinpack (established March 2020) leads the waste reduction effort by providing reusable bottles as alternatives to single-use plastic sachets. Customers of the *warung* (a highly frequented store) get cashbacks and incentives upon returning these bottles. “Consumers get more value for their money and can generate savings by returning their reusable containers,” Anne said.

Koinpack delivers new stock and ensures the empty packs are collected, cleaned, and refilled. The *warung* owners are able to check inventory, track stock orders and estimate stockouts, and process customer transactions online. After eight months, Koinpack avoided more than 10,000 sachets at two *warungs* and four waste banks; upscaling to 1,000 sales points will avoid four million sachet throwaways.

Shifting from single-use to reuse benefits not just the resellers but also fast-moving consumer goods companies (FMCGs). “Prior to Koinpack, a solution that targeted the low-end market using this type of packaging did not exist. Being the first ones to showcase that such a solution is not only possible but even scalable is what makes Koinpack stand out,” Anne said.

A BURGEONING REUSE REVOLUTION

Koinpack has other “reuse sister ventures” under Enviu’s lab. Notably, QYOS (established June 2020) maintains 24/7 refill vending machines with reusable containers that, similar to Koinpack, are created by global packaging solutions company ALPLA. The cashless and touch-less machines, which dispense precise amounts of product (dish soap, body wash, or even



hand sanitizer), are placed at high-density residential areas. This enables more households to refill at the QYOS station instead of purchasing their daily necessities in single-use plastic packaging.

Pursuing a “borrow-reuse-return” scheme, CupKita (established July 2020) allows customers of popular cafés in Indonesia to refuse disposable coffee cups. Instead, they pay via mobile app to rent a reusable cup, and get a cashback upon returning it. Each cup is individually coded and must be returned within seven days; the customer is charged a fee if he keeps it. Based on average coffee sales, CupKita envisions saving anywhere from 525 kilograms to around 2,000 kilograms of disposables per store annually.

Other ventures under the lab include Econesia (established 2019), which offers a full-service water filtration system to residences, retail establishments, and hotels—thereby encouraging consumption of tap water and reducing demand for bottled water, while using refillable glass bottles instead of disposable plastic bottles. In the future, Econesia intends to help hotels go plastic-free by phasing out single-use amenities (shampoo, soap, dental kit, etc.).

Finally, Kecipir (established April 2013, became a joint venture with Enviu in June 2019), manages an online store for local and in-season organic produce bought directly from farmer suppliers at fair prices. Customers can pick up the items fresh (less than a day’s harvesting)—and plastic-free—from Kecipir-exclusive distributors. Using Kecipir’s platform, organic becomes more affordable to customers and the farmers increase their profit.

PROVE IT WORKS, LET OTHERS COPY

Every venture consists of a separate on-the-ground local team that takes care of running and scaling the reuse business model, from operations to marketing-related activities. Each team has one or two venture builders who are responsible for the day-to-day business development, and are supported by Enviu’s back-office such as the marketing and communication team in Indonesia, as well as the Netherlands.

Moreover, Enviu’s team is also actively involved in connecting local and regional ecosystems, such as raising awareness and sharing inspiring stories about available solutions to the plastic crisis. They organize events, including webinars and forums, where key stakeholders from various sectors discuss pathways toward a future without plastic pollution.

“Ultimately, by enabling a plastic-free reuse lifestyle in Indonesia, we expect the impact reach of our ventures to go far beyond the national market. Apart from closing the tap on plastic in the region, our reuse businesses are intended to serve as a global showcase market that will inspire more Zero Waste solutions across the globe,” Anne said.

<https://www.zerowastelivinglab.enviu.org/>

<https://www.instagram.com/zerowastelivinglab/>

SALIN PH AND THE REFILLERY

Refill is the Way

MARLET SALAZAR

The *tingi* or retail economy has been blamed for the proliferation of plastic sachets in the market. These two Philippine initiatives show that retail without plastic sachets is not only possible; they are the way.



SALIN PH: MOBILE RETAIL STORE

The desire to debunk the myth that going Zero Waste is expensive led to the founding of Salin PH (formerly Refill on the Road), a micro, small, and medium enterprise that offers sustainable products and promotes a plastic-free lifestyle.

“We want to make our products accessible by going to different locations and at the same time, compete with the pricing in the supermarkets,” said Krishia Pauline Ellis, CEO of Salin PH.

Salin PH started the preparations of rolling out a mobile refilling service in a customized vehicle targeting mainly

condominiums. The COVID-19 pandemic sidelined the idea but it didn't stop Krishia and the group from pursuing their advocacy.

Salin PH is also trying to challenge the current mindset that selling via *tingi* or retail is not possible without plastic sachets by selling its products via refill. Salin PH's product lineup includes fresh produce—which is the store's bestseller—as well as spices, coffee, superfood, nuts, loose leaf tea, personal, home care products, reusable jars, and eco-bags. In response to the challenges of COVID-19, they used the online platform and increased their digital presence while still ensuring “a great customer experience.”

According to Krishia, the pandemic sped up e-commerce growth. Resources have become decentralized, giving more people better access to products, but it has also become harder to compete and be noticed online. “We learned that it is important to do content marketing continuously so that we can increase our audience.”

While the challenge of the pandemic dampened spirits and the economy, Salin PH is looking at expansion next year.

“We are confident that we will expand even more by 2021 because our priority since the start is solving the needs of our customers,” Krishia said. “As long as we try to understand and talk with them constantly, we believe that we can grow even more.”

THE REFILLERY: YOUR COMMUNITY REFILL STORE

Founded by eco scuba divers who have been doing ocean cleanup until COVID-19 happened, The Refillery is another endeavor that, in the words of one of its founders, Farrah Rodriguez, is trying to be “low impact.”

The Refillery demonstrates, among others, that the pandemic is an opportunity to improve. If for many, the pandemic paused all their planned projects, The Refillery’s founders found an opportunity to continue their environmental work by beginning to sell products via *tingi*.

The initiative also shows that embracing the *tingi* economy does not need to mean resorting to disposable plastic sachets. It sells everyday condiments such as black pepper, canola and vegetable oil, local salt, soy sauce, and vinegar through refillable containers along with household products like dishwashing liquid and 70% ethyl alcohol.

“With the fear of getting the virus from going out and being exposed, our community encouraged a community market that allowed us to refill our neighbors,” Farrah said.

The Refillery started around April or at the height of coronavirus infection and quarantines.

The fear of not working out the business plan and advocacy was quickly erased when upon its launch, the community responded favorably. Seeing that what The Refillery was doing is beyond making a profit, their neighbors supported them openly by patronizing their products. It also helped that people don’t want to be infected so not wanting to go to crowded places such as the supermarket helped push the value proposition of reducing waste.

According to Farrah, she has received demands to open up more shops but she has a day job. However, she is not disregarding the possibility of a branch next year when things will be more manageable than the current situation.

“I’d also love to work with more organizations that can help me learn about eco-projects for communities,” Farrah said.

The *tingi* economy doesn’t have to go if people want to go Zero Waste—we just have to change how we do things—from prioritizing convenience at the expense of the environment, to putting our health and that of the environment on the top when making our choices.

It seems hard, but Salin PH and The Refillery and their likes show the paradigm shift is not only possible, they also make it look easy.

f Refillery’s: <https://web.facebook.com/therefilleryph>

f Salin: <https://web.facebook.com/salin.habit>





REFILLABLES HOI AN

Sparking a Refill Revolution

JOHANNA POBLETE

Refillables Hoi An, the first refillable concept store in Central Vietnam, began with the opposite of an impulse buy: founder Alison Batchelor regretted her decision not to buy a large bottle of hand soap from a salon supply store.

"I went back to the store and they didn't have it," Alison said, recalling how her disappointment turned to elation when a stylist offered to fill up a one-liter bottle then and there. "She went in the back, got a bottle, and filled it up.... [and I thought] all this time, for years, I could have been refilling my bottle! The whole way home, I was like, that's what I could do. I can open a refill store," she said.

FROM CONSUMER TO SHOP OWNER

Alison is no stranger to refill stores. Back in her home country of Canada, she had frequented The Soap Dispensary & Kitchen Staples, Vancouver's first refill shop specializing in premium soaps, household cleaners, personal care products, and DIY products.

"They had a strong Do-it-Yourself (DIY) section, with a lot of individual ingredients that you could put together to make your own things. Through their workshops, I learned how to make hand soap, bar soap, cold-pressed soap, and face cream," Alison said. "I'm a creative at heart."

Alison's previous job marketing an eco-friendly detergent alternative had also trained her to scrutinize ingredients for harmful chemicals that may degrade the environment. This eco-consciousness informed both her buying decisions and her practice of creating alternatives from scratch.

TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS

Alison came across a few roadblocks in developing what would become Refillables Hoi An: her inability to speak the Vietnamese language meant relying on Google Translate; she went through a series of assistants that, though helpful, weren't from Hoi An and left for opportunities elsewhere; and she encountered suppliers who had zero interest in switching from 500mL containers to 30-liter containers.

She persisted in tracing products to their makers and soon built a reliable supplier base that would not compromise on affordable, good-quality, refillable, and eco-friendly products. One of her first suppliers, Minh Hong from nearby Da Nang, understood that Alison wanted to target a low-income demographic and so provided discounts on wholesale prices. These discounts were offset by minimized packaging costs. Minh Hong's team took back their containers, and even picked up the unreturned receptacles of other suppliers, for refilling.

A small shop in Hanoi called Ekoko adapted their packaging to be able to supply Alison not only with mineral salt deodorant but also with refill shampoo, conditioner, and body wash. Similarly, a supplier of coconut oil soap called Nude made their packaging plastic-free. "They used brown paper but there was like a plastic wrap around the soap on the inside. It can't look eco on the outside and then not be on the inside, so they worked with me to realign their packaging," Alison shared.

DIY STARTUP LAUNCHES

Alison invested 6,000 Canadian dollars and a whole lot of legwork into the business. She set up shop at the front of her own house, furnishing it with salvaged and/or refurbished secondhand furniture. In true DIY spirit, her husband transported the found objects and, during his free time, created shelving to be filled up by Alison's curated refills (sold by weight and volume so as to minimize waste) and sustainable alternatives to everyday products (e.g., moon cups, reusable sanitary pads, bamboo toothbrushes, etc.).

"It varies from home care and personal care products, to essential oils, and now we're expanding into foodstuffs. Because of my background, and then my passion and my enjoyment of being able to make things yourself, there's a variety of DIY products," Alison said. "There's a lot we can put together to make very simple cleaning products that are so cheap and affordable, and right now—especially with the coronavirus on a rampage throughout the world and people losing jobs and financial strife—people need affordability."

The store, which marked its second anniversary in December 2020 has become entrenched in the local community. At peak, pre-pandemic, the shop serviced a roster of 30 local businesses. Walk-ins number anywhere from 5 to 20 individual customers daily.

The store's impact on the community has been evident as well. For one, Alison's suppliers are seeing increased patronage from startups. "Now there are three different spots in Da Nang that are doing refills, and those newly opened shops take their cue from Refillables Hoi An in terms of the products they carry," she said.

The expats who have left Vietnam have also been inspired to start their own Zero Waste venture. "I've had people coming to me and wanting to emulate and do a similar shop wherever they are," Alison said.

Alison is keen on avoiding products that are negatively impactful. "There's no more room in a lot of landfills in this area. And people burn their plastic waste because they don't know what else to do with it. So there is such a desperate need for figuring out how to divert stuff from the landfill... I would rather use that plastic bottle until it breaks and has to go to the landfill, than send it prematurely," she said.

 <https://refillableshoian.com/>

 <https://web.facebook.com/refillableshoian>

 <https://www.instagram.com/refillableshoian/>





Going BACK TO BASICS to Move Forward

GEORGINA ORTIZ

It is a project close to their hearts, their proverbial dream-come-true. And those familiar with their story would even dare to say that the whole Back to Basics (BtB) Ecostore idea is aligned with the stars.

After all, the initials of the BtB's five founders—Tanya Conlu, Abi Aguilar, Kate Galido, Arnie Cancio, and Lia Esquillo—spell T-A-K-A-L, the Filipino word for “scoop.” Takal has become a primary activity for the five on weekends, as they prepare the orders that they would deliver to their customers on Tuesdays.

“We would do the actual scooping and pouring of the products in our homes, which we have turned into refillery hubs,” Kate said, laughing.

BtB is a refillery and ecostore that aims to provide easy, affordable, and convenient access to household and personal care products without the unnecessary packaging. It offers refill services for household essentials in any amount that its customers need.

The idea of BtB stemmed from an old Filipino practice of

bringing empty bottles or containers to neighborhood *sari-sari* stores for day-to-day food essentials.

However, this traditional, eco-friendly practice was forgotten when sachets and single-use plastic packaging came.

“We believe that refill systems should become the Filipino normal again,” Kate stressed.

The BtB founders are aware of the challenge of finding affordable and high-quality products that are aligned with their eco-friendly goals.

“We are proud of our products. Our line is a well-curated set of household essentials that we would actually use ourselves,” Lia said, adding that the items they sell come from a combination of big, well-known brands and small, community-based enterprises—all of them bought from suppliers by the bulk.

Lia explained that they do not only cater to their customers' demand for earth-friendly brands and services, but also make sure that their suppliers are aligned with their practices.

Before considering a particular supplier for BtB, she said they would first conduct research and evaluate the supplier's environmental and labor practices.

"We really make sure that they would take back their containers or their carboys and use these for subsequent purchases," she explained.

Lia recounted her experience with soy sauce manufacturer, Marca Piña—recalling how she had started contacting the company via the telephone trunkline and then asking them if they would consider taking back their product containers upon delivery.

"We had to explain to them how we did things at BtB, and in the end, they understood and even provided us a discount for returning their containers," Lia said.

She pointed out that other big manufacturers like cooking oil giant Minola were actually supportive of their mission, generously providing them with carboys that they could use in repurchasing oil.

At present, BtB offers more than 50 household products to its customers—from shampoo bars to fabric conditioners to wild-forest honey and reusable pads.

"Our products are mostly Filipino brands, with the exception of the bamboo toothbrush which is currently unavailable locally," Kate said.

BtB started as a dream among its founders to revive Zero Waste practices among Filipinos. "The four of us—Lia, Kate, Tanya and myself—are environmentalists and belonged to one non-governmental organization before," Abi said.

Arni, who would eventually join the four as one of BtB's driving forces, was Lia's co-parent in their kids' school. Her experience with running her own online shop would eventually prove indispensable in BtB's daily operations.

After holding initial meetings and conducting a market study in December 2018, the BtB founders opened shop in July 2019, which is also plastic-free month.

They started with pop-up stores in bazaars, where it was easy to sell the idea of an earth-friendly, Zero Waste system to customers. "People were enthusiastic, bringing used containers with them for the refilling process," Kate recalled.

Abi said that despite the physical challenges of running a refillery ("We would carry the carboys ourselves, even up many flights of stairs!"), they were happy and received positive feedback from customers.

Business was good, and the five women entrepreneurs eventually considered putting up a physical store to accommodate more customers. And then the 2020 pandemic came.

"We had to stop operations for three months," Kate said. During the enhanced community quarantine from March to May, she recounted driving and bringing products to their customers themselves.

However, the pandemic also provided them with opportunities to help others, Lia said. "For a long time, we had wanted to deliver our products in wooden crates," she said. They finally found a supplier in Pallet Reimagined, a group of Parañaque-based jeepney drivers who lost their jobs because of the pandemic.

"We reached out and ordered from them. We even promoted their products and they were happy that a lot of customers suddenly began contacting them for customized woodworks," Lia said.

BtB resumed normal online operations in June 2020, and their customers were more than happy to resume purchasing earth-friendly, Zero Waste products from the five.

"We are lucky that we are able to run BtB successfully even with our day jobs, because all five of us have supportive families, suppliers, and customers," Lia said.

www.facebook.com/BTBecostore



THAT LITTLE EXTRA

The Heart and Soul of Zero Waste Enterprises in Asia Pacific

SHERMA E BENOSA

Once considered exclusive and primarily associated with privilege, Zero Waste stores have come a long way. Newer breeds of entrepreneurs have made it their mission to address this major criticism of Zero Waste stores being “too niche” by making them more accessible to the general public. But more importantly, these stores collectively showcase various environmentally conscious ways to deliver products—some revolutionizing the traditional concepts of refill and return-deposit using digital technology and marketing suave, while others focused on reintegrating these old sustainable systems into the fabric of everyday consumption practices.

Singapore’s barePack for example has pioneered an app-enabled, membership-based platform to loan reusable food containers for people on the go in partnership with food outlets and leading delivery platforms. Australia’s Bring Me Home, meanwhile, also an app-based platform, rescues surplus food from becoming food waste by connecting people to restaurants at the end-of-day—allowing them to avail of huge discounts for quality food that otherwise would go to the bin.

Indeed, various models of stores adhering to the same principles have grown, offering something patterned after good old practices, but responding to the needs of modern times.

So what is it that sets these entrepreneurs apart? What is it about the way they work that enables them to make a real difference the way billion-dollar multinational corporations are unable to? Our interviews with various enterprises across Asia Pacific showed the following six characteristics:

1. TRUE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM

When Jane Kou founded Bring Me Home, the mission was clear: “to reduce food waste by making surplus food accessible and affordable.”

Food waste is a big issue in the Asia-Pacific region. In Australia alone, over 7.3 million tons of food waste was generated from 2016 to 2017. Jane knew that solving the food waste problem would make a huge difference in addressing food scarcity. “A lot of the end-of-the-day food that might get chucked out if it’s unsold—no one knows where to find them... so that’s why we created the app,” she shared.

With the launch of Bring Me Home in 2017, consumers were able to avail of the same quality food at discounts ranging from 30% to 70%, thanks to the app. Moreover, partner food outlets increased their foot traffic during traditionally slow hours, increasing their profits and minimizing their food waste.

2. GENUINE DESIRE TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE

While the Coca-Colas and Nestles of the world continue to promise to make their packaging recyclable—an unambitious commitment they have not made progress in despite their billions of dollars—these small entrepreneurs have been rolling out their own solutions that are already creating a positive change in their communities.

Roxane Uzureau, founder of barePack Singapore, said that they are guided by their mission of replacing the millions of disposables used daily in food and beverage takeaway and delivery. “I have always been quite sensitive to the notion of waste. It’s something that genuinely upsets me. Everything has an environmental cost, even what you consider free,” she said.

Officially launched in Singapore in 2020, the barePack app has enabled its users to order food using reusable containers which they could return by dropping them off at member-restaurants and other drop-off points.

3. CHANGING CONSUMER MINDSETS AND BEHAVIORS

When these entrepreneurs started with their enterprise, their communities did not have a good understanding of the concept of Zero Waste. Thus, educating the consumers became integral to their advocacy.

“We need everybody to understand that the business stands for a sole purpose: to make this planet a better and cleaner place,” said Rangi Jory Madarang, co-founder of AMGU, a plastic-free store based in Central Philippines.

According to Rangi, there are times when people who are not familiar with Zero Waste would visit their store and come out with a working knowledge on the concept. “They are amazed with what they learned inside the store, and then they come back and become our regulars,” she said.

Cheryl Anne Low, founder of NUDE, a store based in Malaysia, recalled the times they taught children about the concept. “Many children would pop in for biscuits and snacks, so we would teach them to bring their own containers. They would go home, tell their parents, and their curious parents would come visit us. Their praises for what we were doing in teaching their children about the environment and how something like packaging can be harmful to marine life and animals, were always

heartwarming. The parents appreciated what we were doing, and the kids came every day,” she shared.

According to Bittu John Kalungal, proprietor of India’s 7 to 9 Green Store, seeing respected members of the community modeling good behavior, like bringing their own containers, inspires other people to do the same.

“A doctor came to the store with his own container to refill sugar. Another guy was in the shop. This guy watched the doctor refill his own containers, then came to me and asked me: ‘Does he always come with his own containers?’” shared Bittu. “That should be the change coming from everyone. From this incident, the guy realized it’s not bad to bring containers from home and buy by refill. In our society, 20% of the people set the trend and the rest look up at these 20% and try to live like them. If we can change the attitude of the 20%, we can make a huge difference in our society.”

4. FINDING SUPPLIERS

Another key to providing quality and affordable products is having suppliers that are aligned with the Zero Waste goal.

“Making the suppliers understand the reasons why we would like to buy package-free from them and coming up with workable realistic solutions for both parties is important,” NUDE’s Cheryl Ann said, adding that to guarantee the quality of the products they carry, they make sure to go “into the detail of the ingredients and do research on each of the ingredients.”

Alison Batchelor, proprietor of Vietnam’s Refillables Hoi An, agrees. For her store, she traced the makers of various products and built a reliable supplier base that would not compromise on affordable, good-quality, refillable, and eco-friendly products.

When one of her first suppliers understood that Alison wanted to target a low-income demographic consumer base, they provided discounts on wholesale prices. These discounts were offset by minimized packaging costs.

Similarly, another supplier made their packaging fully plastic-free because of Allison. “They used brown paper but there was like a plastic wrap around the soap on the inside. It can’t look eco on the outside and then not be on the inside, so they worked with me to redesign their packaging,” Alison shared.





HOW IT WORKS:

- STEP 1:
Weigh your container and remember!
- STEP 2:
Fill your container with the amount you need. "NO RETURNS" we sell a few if you forgot to bring one."
- STEP 3:
Weigh your product and make a note of the net weight."
- STEP 4:
Pay for your items at the counter, and say "hi" to our staff ☺

REFINED SUGAR P77/100g

WASH P8

SILING DDMANG
head 2.65 65
head 2.65 85
head 1.65 115
head 2.65 175

ROCK SALT P4/10g
WHEAT GERM P4/10g
COINUT OIL P4/10g

MISCOVINO SUGAR P75/100g

COCONUT SUGAR P45/100g

Tumeric with sugar P55/100g

Sambal with sugar P95/100g

SEAMUS CHIPS

ORGANIC RICE
Brown P85/kg
Red P105/kg
Black P105/kg



and capacitating waste workers. The goal of the store is to demonstrate that neighborhood stores—a major point-of-sale of products on plastic sachets—can sell the same basic needs without using plastic packaging. Besides inspiring other neighborhood stores to do the same, Juana Zero also gives back by giving a part of their proceeds to MEF's scholarship fund for the dependents of their stakeholders: the waste collectors.

Meanwhile, Sierreza, also from the Philippines, started out as a non-profit aimed at supporting local farmers and indigenous peoples. Realizing that these communities need a steady market for their products, they established a farmer-centered Zero Waste store to sell local produce.

"Together with the farmers, we set a fair price at the start: something that would give the farmers income. The good

thing about that is that they did not need to overproduce because even if they produce less, the price would still be competitive," said Che Abrigo, founder of Sierreza.

Two years since the start of the project, Sierreza's partner farmers have not only learned to be Zero Waste in every aspect of their production, they have also become empowered to conceptualize and run projects for themselves.

So what sets Zero Waste enterprises apart? It is the add-ons that they bring to the table. The models show that creating environmental and social values are not impossible when doing business. It is not only possible but also desired by consumers. The little extras that they bring to the community are not really little in terms of impact, nor are they mere extra. On the contrary, they are the heart of Zero Waste enterprises.



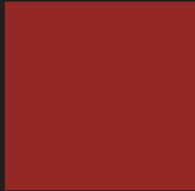
HELPING SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES THRIVE

Against numerous challenges, the social entrepreneurs that stood firm on their beliefs by doing their part to help address the plastic waste issue have managed to disrupt the current unsustainable, convenience-focused delivery systems with their innovative solutions.

The number of Zero Waste stores has grown quickly seemingly as a response to the growing ecological and social crises. And while their rapid growth is nothing short of amazing, the reality is that the plastic waste crisis is rooted in the over-extraction of big fossil fuel companies and a handful of multinational corporations that continually peddle the myth of convenience and the culture of hyper-consumerism all over the globe. If we are to make a dent, we must also sustain and support the innovations these community Zero Waste stores have introduced, and extend the principles of decentralization, fair labor practices, and resource conservation of these enterprises into the foundation of our communities' better normal.

The prerequisite for this alternative system to happen is a supportive environment. Public governments are key to making the sustainable alternative to thrive. Below, we list some steps that governments can take to support Zero Waste businesses.

1. Tackle the offending corporations once and for all. Governments should
 - a. implement extended producer responsibility and require manufacturers to be responsible for the whole life cycle of their product.
 - b. require corporations to fully disclose the amount of plastic used in manufacturing, shipping, retailing, and disposal streams. Corporations cannot remain hush about their actual plastic footprint. Public disclosure allows for effective monitoring, including the establishment of baseline data—disaggregated by type of plastic—against which to measure progress.
2. Issue guidelines for environmentally friendly packaging.
3. Provide strict guidelines on single-use plastics (SUPs) where single-use bags, cutleries, food containers are banned including non-essential use outside of medical facilities.
4. Set aside investment for alternative materials to plastic where there are currently no alternatives.
5. Provide incentives for businesses that follow Zero Waste principles such as refilling stations and Zero Waste stores.
6. Provide incentives to community-driven livelihood projects and businesses.
7. Ban single-use bags and provide incentives for businesses transitioning to plastic-free.
8. Provide incentives that promote local production and manufacturing of essential goods.







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