

Recyclable by nature

[Environment](#)



There is no need to elaborate on the need to protect the environment. One way of protecting the earth from the destructive forces of industrialisation is the ratification of laws that will force companies to establish sustainable practices such as recycling a significant part of their manufactured goods. The usual pattern would be to take back the packaging component of their product such as the recycling of PET bottles. In Mexico a save-the-environment programme called Reciclable por Naturaleza (“ RPN”) or Recyclable by Nature was created by the Junior League Ciudad de Mexico (“ JLCM”) Environmental Committee.

The RPN programme calls for a specific action in the war against pollution and environmental degradation. The programme aims to recycle a non-biodegradable material which requires expensive equipment to recycle because when left on its own the “ multi-layer container” will only breakdown after 35 years. The said volunteers working for RPN created a collaborative network which saw the participation of the manufacturers as well as the consumers. It was not only the manufacturers and the consumers who took part in this endeavour but it also attracted the sellers or distributors of said recyclable materials.

As a result supermarkets and chains of self-service stores allowed the RPN to place some sort of a garbage bin to collect multi-layer containers. The recyclable material is multilayered because, “ The outer layers is made up of polyethylene to provide water tightness to the liquid; the following layer is made out of cardboard to provide rigidity and resistance, and the third one is made up of polyethylene and works as an adherence layer for the

subsequent aluminum film, that acts as a barrier against oxygen, odors, and light.

The fifth layer is polyethylene made and also has an adherence function, while the sixth layer is also made up of polyethylene to make it water tight” (Lozano et al, 2003, p. 1) It has been made clear the government of Mexico and its volunteer arm the JLCM was not merely faced with a simple waste disposal problem. The threat to the environment is a synthetic material that is being used by millions of people. And as a result key cities are plagued with a waste problem that will not simply go away. A new mindset is needed to tackle the issue. The following will describe the challenges faced by JLCM and its RPN programme.

Why did JLCM resort to a cross-sector alliance? One of the first major step the JLCM did to ensure the success of the RPN programme was to reach out to government and private groups that may at first have nothing to do with multi-layer containers. But a deeper analysis will reveal that each one has a part; that even if there are those who belong to other sectors of society they can be made to contribute in their own little way to solve the problem of pollution and environmental degradation. But it was never easy and as one observer puts it, “ It was quite a challenge ... How could an NGO partner with the educational sector?

How could a businessman reach the educational sector? How could some university scholar get in touch with the basic education sector? There were set paradigms to do away with and policies to abide by” (Maas What was the purpose of this collaboration? It was obvious to many that the environmental

problem could not be solved by one entity acting alone without any form of help from the outside. This sentiment was made clear by one Tetra Pak employee who said, “ The problem of cardboard containers affects ALL of us who produce them and ALL of us who use them” (Lozano et al, 2003, p.).

As the years went by and after achieving some degree of success it became unmistakable that fighting environmental problems such as improper waste disposal can only be achieved when all sectors of society contribute their knowledge and expertise to either release much needed funds, educate the public, provide coordination for the different agencies of the government and create a model that can easily be followed and will produce measurable results. Now, no matter how talented are the volunteers of JCLM there is no way that this organization can do all the work.

Another implication for the cross-alliance would be the increasing difficulty of keeping everybody happy. As mentioned earlier all of the members in the alliance have their own reason for jumping on the bandwagon. Some are there because of the sheer force of “ corporate responsibility. ” The authors devoted significant space to describe how Tetra Pak revealed their true intentions. They were not volunteers and surely they are not the first one to get on board.

In fact it took years before the JLCM were able to convince them to join the drive in cleaning up the environment even if Tetra Pak is well aware on how much they contribute to pollution. Tetra Pak joined only so that they will not look bad in the eyes of the public. But JLCM has no complaints they value the contribution of Tetra Pak. But no matter how hard JLCM tries to quarterback

the whole programme and to reduce the number of turnovers or the number of companies or organisation that decided to leave there are still many casualties and their primary reason would be the lack of finances or difficulty in achieving sustainability.

There are others like Recimex who made the erroneous assumption that money can be made while they participate in doing a good work for the city. Another problem would be on how to prevent friction between leaders of the different groups. In the business sector there were those who left the programme because they resented the dominant presence of Tetra Pak. They do not like the idea of Tetra Pak being one of the main players because for them it will seem to appear that it was Tetra Pak who engineered the whole thing.

Is the Government's container collection a real restraint for the programme? The decision to place containers in some key places such as supermarkets, convenience stores, and schools was never a bad idea. It did not limit the RPN. In truth it jumpstarted the programme because in the beginning of the process providing containers that acted as repository for the recyclable materials was the most logical thing to do. Therefore, the container collection scheme did not become a restraint for the RPN programme.

Yet, it was not a smashing success either. There was a need to work on perfecting a seamless process where people can bring in their recyclables and be ensured that the same will be picked up as soon as possible. In the beginning of the project those who were supposed to manage the collection containers were unable to fully grasp the significance of the task. The store

managers, although well aware that they were supposed to collaborate with JCLM placed this newly added task on the bottom of their to-do list for the day.

What other alternatives could be used? A possible alternative would have been to put collection centers near communities e. g. housing projects where concerned citizens can bring out recyclable materials gleaned from their homes. Now, waste management trucks can then be assigned to pick up said materials once a week so that there will be enough space for others who also would like to be a part of the environmental drive of the government. How successful was JLCM in managing the relationship with its main partner, Tetra Pak?

The JLCM was very successful in cultivating its relationship with Tetra Pak because the latter continued to give its support even if other partners already left the RPN programme. This is not simply a matter of observation but even the company voiced its appreciation with how JLCM has improved the quality of life in Mexico. And following explains briefly the evidence for the harmonious and highly productive relationship between the two groups:

- After 1995 Tetra Pak made known its desire to continue the project indefinitely;
- Tetra Pak provided funds to launch RPN; and Tetra Pak paid for RPN's administrative expense e. g. salaries, advertising, and logistics for event organization.

Aside from the collaboration mentioned above Tetra Pak executives have only good things to say about JLCM. For example one of the top leaders, Mr. Sergio made the following remarks, “ They are a group of well-intentioned people, and we are sure they stand for the goals we support... They are very dynamic, very hard-working and committed.

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We continue to back them because we want the programme to become self-sustainable and to replicate it in other parts of the country” (Lozano et al, 2003 p.). It also seems that this is not merely a company ploy to burnish their image to the public because even employees are aware of management’s high regards for JLCM and one of them said that the relationship had always been very good and added that, “...the collaboration will not end unless they (JLCM volunteers) get tired. The company is very committed to the programme at all levels. The relationship would continue even if a programme head were to leave” (Lozano et al, 2003, p. 7)

At the end it was not only Tetra Pak who had nice words to say about JLCM and its RPN programme. The following is the general sentiment for those who were involved in the said drive to clean up the environment, “...the relationship between JLCM and its partners was based on commitment, responsibility and camaraderie thus furthering agreements set at the beginning of the programme Constant communication through bulletins and program events, allowed JLCM to stand out as a professional and committed organization devoted to social programs” (Lozano et al, 2003, p. 1).

The most amazing achievement for JLCM was in its ability to keep all the competing factions from butting heads and also from keeping many of them from leaving. It is admirable to see that after a long time there are still here in the crusade against improper waste management of multi-layer containers. Conclusion The need for environmental programs that will reverse the effects of pollution and overflowing garbage dump sites could

not be stressed enough. But there is very little incentive to pursue such programs.

First of all it is expensive to maintain such programs and secondly it requires hard work. Fortunately for Mexico City there is an organisation that is willing to step into the arena and willed itself to not only provide a model for environmental protection – in the area of waste management – but also made a way to come up with the needed funds to sustain the project. In the process of establishing RPN, JLCM encountered innumerable problems that saw some of the participating organizations leave and abandon what they started. But this did not deter JLCM to forge ahead.

One of their major tactical moves was to pick Tetra Pak as their main collaborator. The decision to go with Tetra Pak resulted in some problems but in the long run it proved to be one of the best decision made by JLCM. Aside from choosing Tetra Pak, JLCM decided to establish ties with government and private groups in a multi-sector collaboration that paid dividends for JLCM's gamble. As for the moment the volunteers that comprise JLCM will feel that they are merely scratching the surface. Well, someone must encourage them to continue their good work.