

Community-Based Waste Management at the Source through the Power of the 'BOVORN' Model

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Abstract

This academic article aims to present methods for managing waste at its source within communities through the use of the BOVORN model⁷, with temples serving as the central hub for driving activities. Monks, who are highly respected by both local residents and government officials, play a leading role in these initiatives. The focus is on collaboration and partnership networks between monks, community members, and government officials, ensuring that all parties work in coordination and support one another. The activity, titled "Waste for Merit," encourages both residents and government officials to bring waste as a form of donation on Buddhist holy days, held twice a month during the full moon. The waste collected for this initiative primarily consists of recyclable materials that can be reused or repurposed, such as plastic bottles, glass bottles, cans, scrap metal, and aluminum, among others. The goal is to reduce the amount of waste in the community and instill proper discipline regarding waste collection and disposal, in accordance with sanitary practices

Keywords: Waste at the Source, Management, BOVORN Model

Introduction

The contemporary global society is characterized by a rush to produce, consume, and fulfill desires quickly. People increasingly seek comfort and material goods or products to satisfy their needs, using money earned through hard work to fulfill their wants without considering the production processes or the impacts of resource usage. These impacts include effects on society, the environment, and local communities. The unchecked consumption of natural resources without regard for the resulting pollution is currently contributing to the problem of excessive waste. Communities lack proper waste disposal areas, and there are no hygienic landfills. This type of society is called "capitalism," where competition, rivalry, and the pursuit of access to production factors are prevalent. Companies compete for market share by offering products that cater to consumer demand for convenience.

The issue of community waste, largely stemming from consumer behavior, arises because the sorting of solid waste at the source is not continuously enforced. Proper waste management is lacking because the focus is on end-point solutions rather than source control, and there is

⁷ The BOVORN model involves the collaboration of three key institutions in Thai culture: homes (Ban), temples (Wat), and schools (Rongrien). These institutions work together to form a network of mutual support, fostering cooperation within the community. The term 'BOVORN' is derived from the initials of these three Thai words and can be kept in its original form or explained further depending on the context of the article.

insufficient discipline among citizens and inconsistent enforcement by authorities (Sutana Boonlua et al., 2021: 17-18). Municipalities hire private companies to manage waste, which is dumped in landfills without proper control, resulting in environmental problems and pollution for nearby residents. This includes the spread of diseases and contamination of the soil and water sources (Kwankanit Intaratrakul and Nattha Pensupa, 2020: 9).

One of the most problematic types of waste in Thailand, which is not properly managed, is plastic water bottles. These are difficult to dispose of because they take a long time to decompose and cause environmental damage, polluting water, soil, and air, with long-term effects on human health (Theenida Buntornwon and Ratchada Phakdeeying, 2022: 132-133). Upon closer examination of the plastic bottles we use today for drinking water, we can identify four waste components: the bottle cap, the plastic ring under the cap, the bottle itself, and the branding sticker. Manufacturers aim to produce high-quality products with appealing packaging, often involving multiple layers and components to enhance product image. This excessive packaging creates a significant amount of waste.

The problem of packaging waste arises from technological advancements and changing consumer behavior, with a growing preference for products with attractive packaging that also protects them during transport (Maneechan Puengpakdee, 2020: 550). The competition to gain commercial advantage by developing better products or services showcases leadership in creating differentiation and added value, which influences consumer perception and confidence in purchasing decisions. However, the trend toward products with aesthetically pleasing but difficult-to-decompose packaging materials exacerbates environmental pollution, negatively impacting society and the quality of life of the population (Nichada Keeratiurai et al., 2020: 7). The materials used in packaging to enhance its appearance cater to consumer desires for luxury and product confidence. This leads to the creation of waste in communities, often done unconsciously or unintentionally by consumers. Today, the production of waste from packaging for consumer goods is increasing, with an emphasis on luxurious designs and additional materials to ensure consumer confidence in the product.

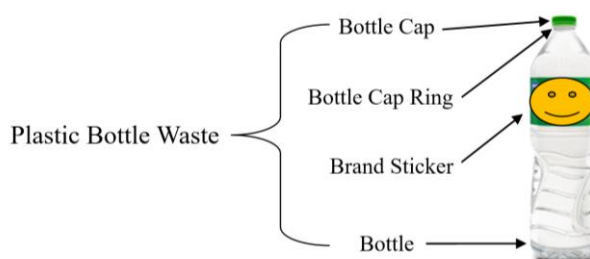


Figure 1: Waste Components from a Plastic Bottle

Waste Management Issues at the Source in Communities

The problem of waste management at the source in most Thai communities stems from the behaviors and discipline of the people, leading to issues with waste sorting from the very beginning. People in these communities lack knowledge about waste sorting and there is insufficient promotion of waste sorting practices. Furthermore, there is a lack of efforts to instill discipline in waste disposal, with many people adopting careless habits, mimicking the behavior of previous generations who believed that someone would eventually burn the waste or that it would naturally decompose on its own. Most household waste is generated from daily activities, including food scraps, plastic, glass bottles, foam containers, and paper. Additionally,

agricultural waste such as leaves, branches, and chemical pesticide containers and boxes are common. In most villages, residents manage their household waste themselves, but improper waste management practices at the source have led to health and environmental impacts. The primary health issues observed are respiratory problems such as coughing, nasal congestion, and dizziness caused by exposure to smoke and dust from burning waste (Dittaphol Jaisue et al., 2017: 43-44).

Over the years, community-based waste management in Thailand has not been successful due to a lack of serious collaboration, inconsistency in raising public awareness, and inadequate waste sorting practices. The public has not been actively involved in sorting waste. Moreover, the government's waste management process, from the source to the end stage, lacks efficiency, with poor waste collection systems, inadequate facilities, insufficient personnel, and a lack of garbage trucks. Additionally, the ineffective enforcement of waste management laws has compounded the problem (Salee Incharoen et al., 2020: 153-154).

The absence of proper and hygienic waste management practices at the household level has led to an increase in waste in communities, with many facing a shortage of proper waste disposal sites. Some communities do not have any designated waste disposal areas, forcing residents to resort to burning or burying the waste on their own land. In some areas, waste disposal sites are managed by local administrative organizations, such as municipalities or subdistrict administrative organizations. However, these sites are often subject to disputes and complaints regarding foul odors and the spread of diseases from waste, significantly affecting the quality of life of the residents.

Neglect of Waste Management at the Source in Communities

The issue of waste management at the source in communities has not been raised as a social concern, nor has it been instilled in the public to raise awareness among children and youth about the benefits of waste sorting from the source. As a result, people in Thai society tend to ignore the waste they create around themselves and within their families. This neglect is not solely the responsibility of individuals; rather, it stems from poor management by the government or related agencies. This has led to a common mindset in Thai society that sorting waste is futile, as waste collectors eventually combine all types of waste when loading it onto the garbage trucks. Consequently, household waste sorting is perceived as pointless.

It is clear that there are only a few agencies, such as municipalities, sanitation departments, and subdistrict administrative organizations, that take serious responsibility for waste management. This limited scope of responsibility has hindered effective and efficient waste disposal, leading to a significant accumulation of waste. As a result, waste has been a critical issue both at the local and national levels for a long time (Chawalit Boonsrirat and Sathapond Mongkonsrisawat, 2019: 25).

Many local administrative organizations continue to face ongoing challenges in managing solid waste, especially due to improper waste disposal methods. The accumulation of waste is exacerbated by inefficient waste collection, frequent landfill fires, and insufficient waste containers. Municipalities lack the capacity to efficiently collect waste, leading to an accumulation problem. Additionally, there is a lack of promotion of proper waste management knowledge and value-added initiatives from waste (Thongphon Promsaka Na Sakolnakorn and Unruan Leknoi, 2021: 363).

Therefore, to ensure efficient waste management at the source within communities and maximize the benefits of waste management, the government or relevant agencies must provide

waste collection trucks capable of separating different types of waste, along with color-coded garbage bags for waste sorting. Waste collection personnel must be knowledgeable and capable of properly educating the public about correct waste sorting practices.

The BOVORN Community and Waste Management at the Source

Thai society is one that thrives on generosity, mutual assistance, and collaborative work through partnership networks. People live in harmony, helping one another and contributing to the community. Thais possess a sense of social responsibility, engaging in activities that benefit society, sharing resources, and sacrificing personal time and happiness to help others and serve the community (Chittra Seangwatanarerk et al., 2017: 89). Local communities are built on the foundation of their own beliefs, values, and capabilities, characterized by self-reliance and active participation, fostered through the collaboration and cooperation of local community members (Airawee Weeraphanpong, 2014: 61-62).

The spirit of cooperation in Thai society involves various organizations and entities working together, which is referred to as "BOVORN." This concept encompasses (1) "B" for Ban (home/community), representing the people and residents of the community, (2) "W" for Wat (temple), involving monks and novices, and (3) "R" for Rongrien (school) or government agencies, including teachers, students, government officials, and civil servants. The collective strength and collaboration of these entities form what is known as the "BOVORN Power."

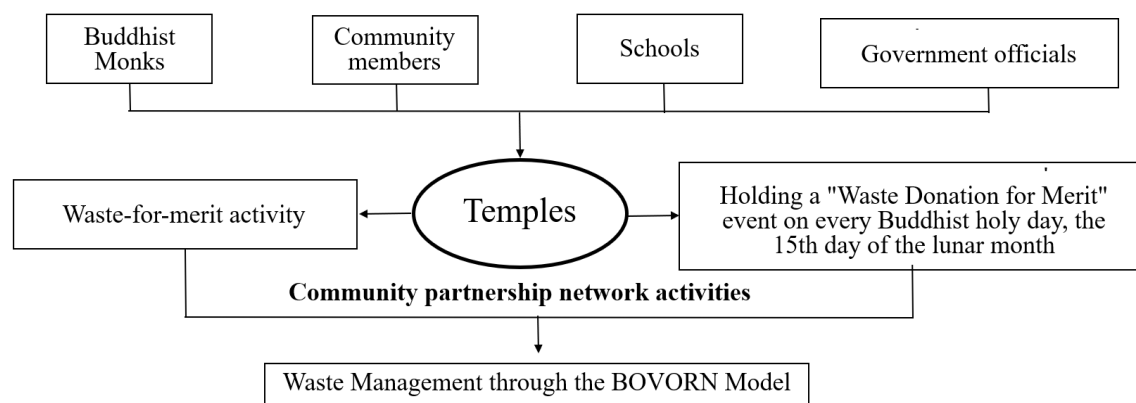


Figure 2: Participatory Process for Waste Management at the Source through the BOVORN Model

Waste management at the source through the BOVORN model is considered a community-based method for reducing the amount of waste in the community. This approach helps to limit excessive waste and reduce waste collection costs for local administrative organizations, such as municipalities and subdistrict administrative organizations. The model relies on fostering collaboration and participation from community members, including monks, residents, government officials, civil servants, teachers, and students. Together, they gather ideas and design activities to reduce waste, sorting it into different categories to facilitate easier collection and disposal. Additionally, some types of waste that can generate income are separated from biodegradable waste, allowing those who sort the waste to earn money, which can help support their families.

Under the concept of waste management at the source through the BOVORN model, a key activity that has been implemented, with temples serving as the central hub for driving the initiative, is the "Waste-for-Merit" activity. This activity shifts the traditional belief surrounding merit-making, which typically involves donating money or offerings to monks or for the

maintenance of Buddhist religious sites, such as repairing ordination halls, pavilions, or monk residences. The new concept promotes the idea that donating waste can also accumulate merit, just like offering money or other material offerings.

This new approach allows everyone in the community to participate in merit-making equally, whether they are rich or poor. Even families without money can collect waste from the streets and participate in the merit-making process. This collective effort helps to reduce waste in the community and makes it easier for government agencies to manage waste collection, while simultaneously encouraging cleanliness and a shared responsibility for waste management.



Figure 3: Driving Waste Management through the BOVORN Model

BOVORN Power Activities for Waste Management at the Source in Communities

The activity known as "Waste-for-Merit" was adapted by monks from the original "Waste-for-Eggs" program, which was overseen by government agencies such as municipalities, sanitation departments, and subdistrict administrative organizations. The original program encouraged community members to bring recyclable waste, weigh it, and exchange it for eggs, with the goal of promoting self-managed waste disposal and focusing on recyclable waste that could generate income for households (Onanong Cheablam et al., 2020: 140). The objective of this activity is to reduce waste at the source within the community by using the concept of "merit" in the context of Buddhism to motivate residents to help keep their community clean and to sort their waste properly. This activity is driven by the participation of community members, known as "BOVORN Power," and follows these steps:

1. **Community Consultation:** A meeting is held with the community, including monks, residents, and representatives from government agencies such as schools, subdistrict administrative organizations, community health centers, and village health volunteers.
2. **Planning and Activity Design:** Responsibilities are divided among participants, and collaborative efforts are organized, forming a partnership network.
3. **Requesting Budget Support:** Funding is requested from various agencies involved in waste management, as well as donations from monks and community members who wish to support the cause.
4. **Constructing Waste Sorting Facilities:** A waste storage facility is built to accommodate the waste brought by residents and other organizations for the merit-making activity.

5. Publicizing the Activity: Information is disseminated to every household using the temple and community loudspeaker systems, mobile broadcast vehicles, posters, and social media platforms such as Facebook and village group chats.

6. Waste Collection by Monks: Monks at the temple accept donations and waste for the merit-making activity, guiding residents on how to properly sort and store the waste.

7. Coordinating with Recyclers: When the waste reaches a significant amount, a recycler is contacted to purchase the waste brought by community members. The proceeds from the waste are converted into income.

8. Utilizing the Proceeds: Income from waste sales is used to pay the temple's water and electricity bills, as well as to support temple maintenance and educational scholarships for students from underprivileged families, in accordance with the religious charity work of the monks.

Additionally, the "Waste-for-Merit" activity operates year-round, with waste collection and merit-making events held twice a month, on major Buddhist holy days or the 15th day of the lunar month. During these events, monks encourage community members to bring recyclable waste, such as plastic bottles, glass bottles, cans, scrap metal, and aluminum, from any location—along roadsides, fences, or canals—to participate in the merit-making activity. This initiative helps reduce the amount of waste in the community, preventing the community from becoming overly polluted, unsightly, or plagued by foul odors that disrupt daily life. It also fosters a sense of shared responsibility and discipline in waste collection and sorting among all community members.



Figure 4: Waste Sorting Activities in the Community Driven by "Merit"
New body of knowledge

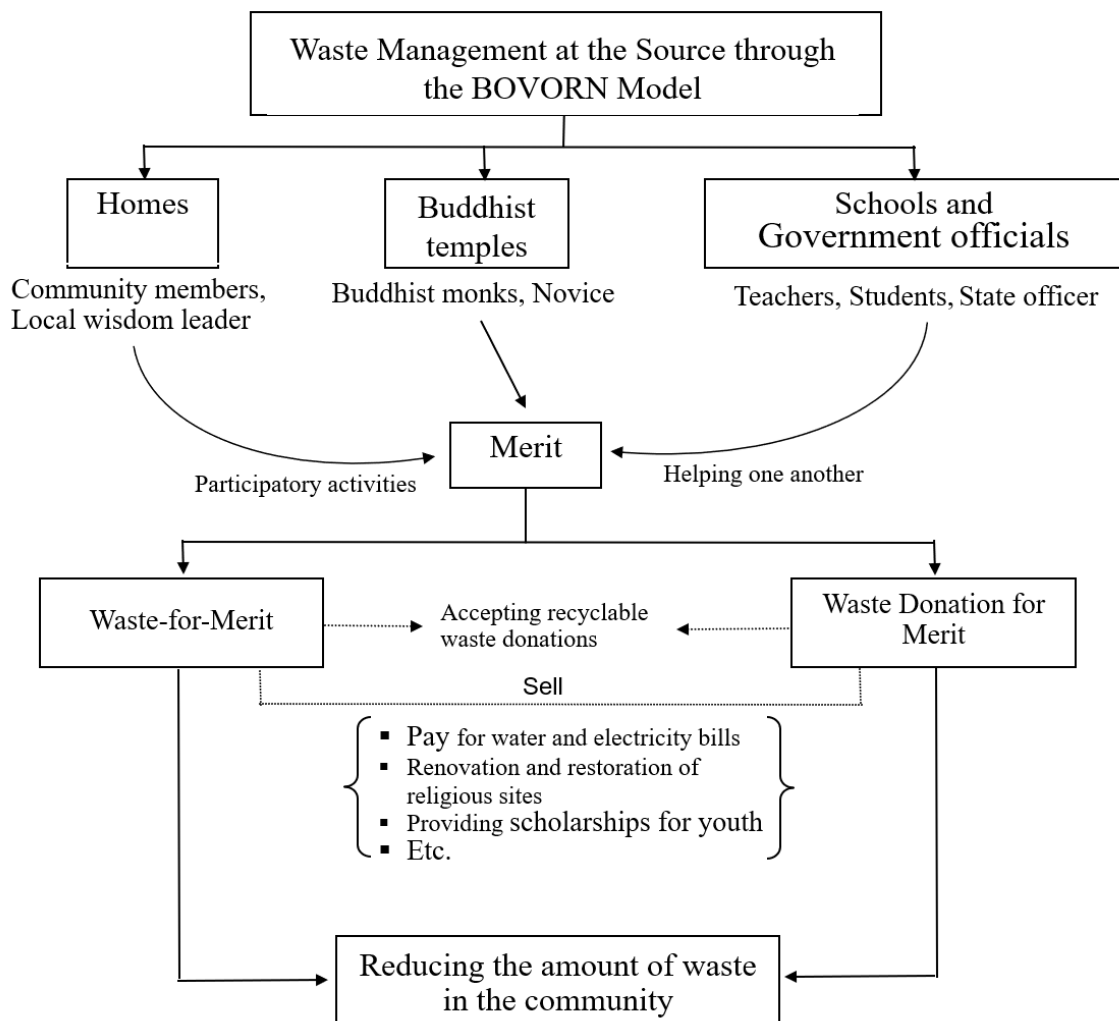


Figure 5: shows the new body of knowledge

Figure 5 illustrates the management of waste at the source within the community, through the collaboration and mutual support of the BOVORN partnership network, consisting of homes, temples, and schools/government agencies. The term “merit” serves as the driving force behind the activities, with the temple acting as the community's central hub. Residents, government officials, civil servants, teachers, and students are encouraged to bring recyclable waste for merit-making, participating in events such as "Waste-for-Merit" and "Waste Donation for Merit." The temple sells the donated waste, using the proceeds to cover the temple's expenses, such as water and electricity bills, and for the repair and maintenance of religious sites. This activity is a way to reduce the amount of waste in the community by combining the concept of merit with cooperation under the BOVORN model.

Summary

Waste management through the BOVORN model in Thai society is a collaborative effort among the community's partnership network. The process is swift and actionable, with decisions made through joint consultations between monks, residents, and government officials. These three parties work together harmoniously, relying on mutual assistance. Waste management in the community must be tackled through coordinated efforts, utilizing the strength of the BOVORN model. All parties must contribute, with no single group bearing the responsibility or burden alone. Residents and monks must cooperate with government officials in tasks that the government cannot accomplish alone, due to budget limitations.

The “Waste-for-Merit” activity, led by monks, helps to reduce the amount of waste in the community and promotes efficient waste sorting at the source. It is a cost-effective initiative driven by the faith in the concept of “merit” in Buddhism. The activity involves merit-making through waste, with “Waste Donation for Merit” events held twice monthly on major Buddhist holy days or the 15th day of the lunar month. These efforts demonstrate the strength of the BOVORN model, which fosters social collaboration to effectively manage household waste, thereby significantly reducing the amount of waste in the community to the satisfaction of all its members.

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