

‘Boentelan’ evokes Indonesia’s green past

Green lifestyles have been practiced by many cultures in Indonesia for a long time. Now one group is trying to introduce a more fashionable form environmental awareness to Jakarta. Lantan Bentala, an independent environmental group, set up Boentelan, a movement promoting eco-friendly wraps, to remind Indonesians of the way their ancestors used to carry things.

“Javanese call the wraps buntelan, while in Banjarmasin [South Kalimantan] they call it pundutan. We spell [it] using the old spelling [boentelan] to remind people of this old habit,” Evelyn Suleeman of Lantan Bentala told The Jakarta Post in Depok, West Java, on Thursday. “The habit shows that our predecessors practiced a green lifestyle long before we did.”

Lantan Bentala set up a booth outside the University of Indonesia’s Political and Social Science Faculty on Thursday to promote the wraps and demonstrate how to use them. Evelyn said that the group had also been inspired by furoshiki, the Japanese art of wrapping using cloth.

“Furoshiki features many different ways to wrap things. We are imitating the style to make the wraps look fashionable. However, instead of using silk-cloth like the Japanese, we use cotton cloth with batik patterns,” she said. Evelyn said she hoped people would buy the wraps, which could also be used to wrap gifts.

She said that the biggest challenge was to maintain the habit of using wraps so it did not become a temporary trend. “That’s why we started to promote it to college students,” Evelyn said, adding that Lantan Bentala previously promoted the wraps to students at the London School of Public Relations in Jakarta.

Ida Syahranie, a guest lecturer at UI and an avid wrap user, said that she had been using cloth in lieu of plastic bags since her youth. “My mom used to wrap my lunch box using pundutan and I have kept up the habit. Several years ago, I worked at a Japanese firm, and I saw my Japanese colleagues wrap their lunch boxes in cloth in unique ways. I was interested so I started to learn the Japanese style,” she said.

Ida said that the habit might significantly reduce plastic bag use. According to the Jakarta Sanitation Agency, the city creates an average 6,500 tons of garbage a day. About 14 percent of the 2,925 tons of inorganic waste generated daily in Jakarta is comprised of plastic. Plastic takes a long to biodegrade, up to thousands of years, and thus poses a threat to the environment. (swd)