

Garbage helps save environment

Crouched and concentrated, August and Karma rip open knotted plastic bags at the foot of a big pile of rubbish.

Yoghurt cups, paper packaging, plastic, pineapple rinds, cabbage leaves, chicken bones and such fall out. The young men begin sorting. Organic material goes to one side, and bottles, plastic and paper to the other. "A super job," remarks Karma, 23. "Finally, reliable work."

The two sort their rubbish and that of their neighbors, too. For the past year, the 325 families in Griya Serpong — a working class housing area of Tangerang, a city some 40 kilometers south-west of Jakarta - have been disposing of their garbage themselves.

Municipal garbage collection was never reliable, and the residents used to dump their refuse in a vacant field — a paradise for rats, flies, mosquitoes and snakes.

Everything is different now. The roofed garbage sorting facility is a source of local pride. "It's got a lot cleaner here," notes Ulil Albab, the project's honorary chairman. "Nobody wanted to have anything to do with rubbish before. Now we bring school kids here and show them how to compost," Karma was quoted by Manila Bulletin as saying.

Residents built the facility with the help of BEST, a local non-governmental organization focusing on urban poverty and community development, and BORDA (Bremen Overseas Research and Development Association), a German non-profit organization that aims to improve the living conditions of disadvantaged communities and to keep the environment intact.

At a monthly cost per family of Rp12,000, or a little over US\$1, August and Karma sweep through the alleyways of Griya Serpong with their moped and trailer every day collecting garbage — 400 kilograms of it. They compost all organic refuse at the sorting facility. It is then sold along with the plastic, glass and paper.

Agathe, 35, has made a business out of rubbish. She collects discarded detergent and noodle bags. She and her girlfriends fashion colorful handbags and wallets from them. When everything of value has been separated out of the housing area's refuse, no more than 30 percent remains. It is taken to a tip.

BEST Director Hamzah Harun Al Rasyid is pleased. "It's a win-win situation," he says. "The residential area is cleaner, there are new jobs, and there is considerably less rubbish, so we're reducing methane emissions from the garbage tips."

Karma and August constantly turn over the compost pile, which aerates it. This helps prevent the formation of methane, a potent greenhouse gas that makes garbage tips a big contributor to global warming. As Indonesia's population grows rapidly, so do the piles of garbage that are produced by the country's more than 240 million inhabitants.

While recycling is a booming industry — for example in Germany, where it generates some \$67 billion in revenues annually — almost all of the garbage in Indonesia is incinerated or dumped in open tips. About 1.8 million tons of garbage is likely to be produced daily worldwide by 2025, according to BORDA. In Indonesia, 62 percent of the refuse is organic and can be composted but there is no large-scale sorting of refuse.

Facilities like the one in Griya Serpong are catching on. The twenty-first one is to be inaugurated in the near future, and many other communities are clamoring for their own. "We estimate that each facility like this reduces methane by 132 tons a year," said Jati Kusumowati, who works at the BORDA office in the city of Yogyakarta.