



**DRAFT LEARNING NOTES**

**ZERO WASTE SEMINAR**

**MONDAY, 08 MAY 2017**

**DURBAN BOTANIC GARDENS**

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As SDG 12 is premised on responsible consumption and production, it is the responsibility of all citizens around the globe to play a role in safeguarding it. There is an urgent need for pertinent steps to be taken in changing the way goods are produced and consumed. Water conservation is also another aspect that deserves attention, as approximately 70% of all freshwater is consumed by humans.

The efficient management of our shared natural resources, and methods of pollutant and toxic waste disposal are important approaches in achieving this goal. Waste affects all habitants and in order to secure earth longevity, collaborative substantial efforts must be focussed on developing various ways to effectively manage it. Hence, the mobilization of industries, businesses, and citizens to reduce waste in daily activities is paramount. Thus, Goal 5 of SDG 12 aims to substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse by 2030.

In this regard, thought-leader and internationally renowned Ms. Bea Johnson, the founder of the Zero Waste Lifestyle Movement was invited to share details of this phenomenon. Her presentation challenged participants to cultivate a zero waste culture within the City.

As part of eThekweni Municipality's commitment of localising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the City's Parks and Recreation Unit, Durban Cleansing and Solid Waste Unit and have partnered with MILE around SDG 12 to host a Seminar on Responsible Consumption and Production, more specifically, how to maintain a zero waste lifestyle. The Seminar was hosted on 8 May 2017 at the Botanic Gardens Conference Centre. The 133 strong audience comprised of key decision-makers, various stakeholders, and representatives of organizations interested in conservations, environmental sustainability, and waste management.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the seminar were as follows:

- To raise awareness on Sustainable development goals and mobilise support from various stakeholders to get involved in implementing the goals.
- Promote new thinking on responsible consumption and production and shift towards a culture of Zero Waste.
- Create a platform for future engagements and foundations for develop strategic partnerships and synergies between private and public sector organisations on sustainability.
- To lay the basis for policy discussions on improving waste management initiatives in Durban

## **WELCOMING ADDRESS – PARKS AND RECREATION**

In setting the scene, all guests were welcomed and acknowledged. In his address, Mr Sbu Mkhwanazi from the City's Parks and Recreation department emphasized the importance of minimising waste in carrying out daily activities. It was indicated that it is a trend to convene workshops and develop strategies detailed in thick documents that end up gathering dust in cabinets. In this light, he highlighted that the purpose of the seminar was to act decisively and “walk the talk” towards achieving zero waste. As we are living in a technology era, there was a call to extend imagination of what the fourth industrialization would offer.

## **MESSAGE OF SUPPORT – DURBAN SOLID WASTE**

Esteemed guests were also welcomed by the Head of Durban Solid Waste (DSW), Mr Raymond Rampersad. He enlightened guests with the fact that Ethekewini Municipality generates 6000 – 8000 tons of waste daily. Considering this alarming amount, he highlighted that a sustainable approach must be adopted in tackling waste. Given the magnitude of the zero waste concept, guests were encouraged to apply their minds in seeking methods of convincing other people to join the culture, and government mapping out pilots with time frames. He called for a paradigm shift on daily choices that are made. It was refreshing to hear leadership from the Municipality acknowledging that recycling has limitations, and that ultimately we need to embrace a zero waste lifestyle in the longer term.

## **REDUCING FOOD WASTE – FOOD AND TREES FOR AFRICA**

On behalf of Food and Trees for Africa in KwaZulu–Natal, Ms Bharathi Tugh gave an informative presentation on 15 smart ways of reducing food waste. Participants were initially stimulated with visuals of delectable gourmet meals and desserts, which sparked a jovial reaction. Thereafter, an unattractive depiction of messy plates was showcased which highlighted the amount of leftover food wastage. In this regard, she alluded to the 10million tons of food wastage evident in South Africa alone. Alongside food waste, she made reference to 600kl of water wastage during food production.

In line with the presentation theme, the first tip provided for reducing food waste was to shop smart and planning for necessities. Secondly, participants were advised to apply the First in First Out principle when unpacking groceries and transferring them to refrigerators and pantries. Moreover, she urged participants to monitor what they throw out by regularly maintaining a record of food items thrown out. Furthermore, stock taking was encouraged by noting expiry dates and storing food accordingly. Thereafter, eating leftovers for lunch at work or school was also suggested. To ensure extended preservation of food, better storage in airtight containers, fridges and freezers was encouraged.

Participants were also advised to use wilting vegetables to make nutritious soups, and fruits could be transformed to delicious smoothies and fresh juice. The presentation highlighted the importance of understanding expiry dates as they are only an indicator of the product's peak quality suggested by manufacturers. Making compost was also identified as a useful method of discarding fruit and vegetable peels and seeds. Furthermore, participants were strongly encouraged to only eat when there is a necessity and not for other reasons.

Similarly, sharing meals in restaurants was encouraged in order to avoid over-eating and discarding left-overs from the big portions served. In cases where sharing is impossible, taking leftovers home was suggested as an alternative. Participants were discouraged from using trays when eating in cafeterias, as it was associated with reducing food waste. Moreover, using every ingredient when cooking was strongly encouraged, as there are health benefits associated with this. Lastly, participants were encouraged to educate other people and adopt this approach as a lifestyle.

### **OWN LESS, WASTE LESS, LIVE MORE – BEA JOHNSON**

Internationally renowned and award-winning speaker, author, lifestyle expert and founder of the Zero Waste Lifestyle Movement was the guest speaker of the event. She shattered preconceptions of responsible consumption and environmental sustainability through advocating for sustainable waste elimination methods. Her visually rich presentation was embedded on her trial-and-error-journey, with engaging and informative light-hearted commentary. Participants were educated on the Zero Waste ideology that challenges the current initiatives for sustainable living. This system is premised on maximising the use of food and products, without their disposal. Bea explained that her household comprising of four members, only produced a jar of waste during the entire 2016 year. She attributed her success for this achievement by constantly applying and upholding the 5Rs (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Rot). Individual themes were discussed in the following manner:

#### **Refuse**

Bea's first secret to success in her Zero Waste endeavour is the refusal of the unnecessary. She drew a strong linkage between clutter and people constantly accepting items that are of no significance to them. Examples of these were identified as promotional mail, business cards, and souvenirs.

#### **Reduce**

Commentary was made on minimising belongings such as furniture, clothes, household utensils and equipment. In this manner, she indicated that not only would the second hand

market be elevated through de-cluttering, but it is an opportunity that translates to financial rewards.

### **Reuse**

In elaborating on this aspect of the lifestyle, she offered a range of approaches that one can adopt. This included the exchange of paper towels with napkins, substituting paper plates and cups with glass at gatherings, and the substitution of foil with jars to store food. It is worth highlighting that the ZeroWaste phenomenon appeals to a paradigm shift in consumer behaviour. Therefore, participants were encouraged to buy products that have multiple uses in order to avoid disposal. She also encouraged participants to steer clear from plastic bags and rather opt for carrying their own reusable containers. The importance of purchasing second hand products through online or physical platforms was emphasised.

### **Recycle**

For products that cannot be refused, reduced, or reused, Bea indicated that it is only at that point whereby people can resort to recycling. Thereafter, useful recycling tips were shared with the participants.

### **Rot**

As the final resort, participants were encouraged to rot waste. This is inclusive of floor sweepings and peels from fruits and vegetables. However, in this regard she encouraged participants to maximise on the peels, as they also offer numerous nutrients.

Bea's presentation also specifically highlighted three benefits offered by ZeroWaste. It was indicated that from applying this phenomenon, people lead healthy lives, as all toxins from their bodies would be removed as they would be carefully selecting what they consume. Next, financial savings were identified as another advantage that can be enjoyed. Finally, it was pointed out that ZeroWaste provides an opportunity for people to enjoy life based on experiences rather than tangible belongings.

In her concluding remarks, Bea offered top tips in being part of the waste-free movement. She strongly urged the participants to always follow the 5R's in order as a starting point. In the case of uncertainty or for more enlightenment on the topic, her website ([www.zerowastehome.com](http://www.zerowastehome.com)) was mentioned as a portal readily available with information. Moreover, buying was likened to voting, as consumers encourage the production of what they constantly purchase. Therefore, it was highlighted that power lies with consumers and they must be vocal.

## **FACILITATED DISCUSSIONS**

Participants were esteemed by the presentation and engaged Bea on a couple of aspects regarding the topic of the seminar. There was much discussion on efforts that could be made in applying ZeroWaste in the household and at work. Some participants noticed the lack of books in Bea's house in one of the depictions of the presentation. She shared with the audience that all books were donated to the library, and that her children loan them if need be. Furthermore, she also shared that she owns one recyclable notepad and one pen with re-fillable liquid ink. With regards to food, participants were encouraged to shop with an open mind and adopt a proactive approach, by making bulk purchases. In the South African context, Food Lovers Market was identified as one of the suitable shops that can promote this lifestyle.

On a lighter note, some participants wanted to know the contents of the 2016 waste jar. Bits of toilet paper, a plaster, vegetable stickers, bits of biking repair, a balloon, and dried leftover paint were examples of the contents.

## **LESSONS LEARNT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DURBAN**

The following suggestions in moving forward were raised:

1. Undertaking education campaigns was identified as one of the ways in which could raise public awareness.
2. Curriculum for Education must be reviewed to accommodate ZeroWaste.
3. It was suggested that Local Government Policy should move away from a linear framework and towards a cyclic economy. This would affirm SDG Goal 12.
4. In order to secure buy-in, all initiatives should be incentivised for example by means of the re-introduction of empty bottle refunds.
5. There was a call for the banning of bottled water.
6. The banning of single-use plastic was also raised as a recommendation.
7. Government must develop regulatory frameworks for industry to move towards the production of Hemp Plastic for their biodegradable nature.

8. Manufacturers and suppliers of bottled water and plastic bags must be held accountable.