

Environmental protection and creation of income from PET recycling

Background

Swisscontact has been active for many years in Central America as well as Bolivia in fields such as vocational education, promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises and urban environment. In 2003 Swisscontact started PET recycling projects in El Salvador and Costa Rica. The experiences gained where in 2005 successfully transferred to Bolivia. Similar projects started in Guatemala and Panama at the beginning of 2008.

Goal

The goal in all three countries is to increase the collection rate of PET beverage containers to at least 40% and thus reduce environmental pollution caused by solid waste. For the purpose of recycling, an independent body is created, supported by private enterprises and public entities.

Activities

To ensure that national players carry out the activities from the very beginning, Swisscontact initiated in all three countries local foundations – *FundaPET (Costa Rica)*, *ReciPlast (El Salvador)*, *Fundare (Bolivia)* – which coordinate all activities regarding the recycling process of PET beverage containers. These foundations organise PET collection and recycling in cooperation with schools, national and regional chambers of commerce and industry, city councils and private companies active in the field of waste disposal. The city councils, along with numerous private companies, are represented in the board of trustees.

In all three countries, the PET collection has been introduced in schools as activity which stimulates the environmental education on all levels. In return for their collection activities, the schools receive the lion's share of the profits in form of urgently needed teaching tools, such as chalk boards, projectors, etc.

In the Bolivian La Paz/El Alto conurbation, waste pickers are organised and assigned as responsible for the collection service in the associated schools. They have been recognised by the city council as recycling specialists and given the appropriate compensation.

Buyers of the recycled PET beverage containers are local small and medium enterprises (SME). They usually re-sell the compacted or shredded material to companies abroad, but recently a number of local recycling initiatives have come up, producing items such as brooms, coat-hangers, clothespeg, balls etc. out of the formerly disposed PET.

To prepare the field for the local recycling foundations, Swisscontact started from the very beginning creating awareness among the local governments of the importance of recycling



activities. The conditions are favourable: the general public is increasingly aware that badly managed solid waste is a risk for public health and the reason for high costs of waste disposal. Local governments are therefore forced to improve their collection systems and dumping sites. Central and local governments were assisted by Swisscontact in setting up a regulatory framework that obliges PET generating enterprises to take care of the disposed beverage containers and encourages recycling activities.

Achieved results



In **Costa Rica**, the collection rate for PET increased within three years from 8% to 35%, thanks to the pupils of the numerous associated schools and alliances with enterprises, such as the big bottling factory “Florida Bebidas”. FundaPET has been covering schools, public institutions and private enterprises all over the country with awareness building campaigns on the importance and opportunities of PET recycling.

Furthermore FundaPET brought together major players in the chain of PET, in order to elaborate a legal framework that will motivate the collection and recycling of formerly disposed PET. In May 2007 an assessment proved, that the actual collection rate would justify the building of a local plant for the processing of the PET containers into flakes. The total investment of around 6 million USD shall be assumed by a private partner.

In **El Salvador**, Reciplast counts actually on eleven corporate partners, among them the big bottling factory “La Cascada”. About thirty schools all over the country act as collection points for PET beverage containers, a network which is completed by local governments and healthcare facilities. Reciplast is also advising the Ministry of Environment to set up a regulatory framework that will oblige PET generating enterprises to take care of disposed containers and encourage recycling activities.



Fundare **Bolivia** became reality in 2006. Important contributors are so far the Coca-Cola Foundation, the bottling factory Embol and the big textile enterprise Ametex. Waste pickers that cooperate with Fundare, pay regular visits to the educational units, to fetch the collected PET and bring it to an intermediate deposit, from where it is transferred by the Fundare lorry for sale to a local company. Half of the earning is refunded to the educational unit in form of didactic materials, 40% gets the waste picker in cash, and the remaining 10% cover the logistic services provided by the foundation.

Swisscontact intervenes in the PET recycling strictly as a facilitator: local foundations - sustained by private enterprises and public entities - are enabled to play the role of an independent unit that seeks extending and optimizing the efficiency of the existing recycling activities. All local foundations are working towards a countrywide coverage, with a special focus on densely populated areas where the consumption of PET beverage containers is high.

The replication of the project in other countries in the region or even other parts in the world is feasible. The expansion to other materials is also possible, depending on the local needs.