UniSey and Swiss university students explore the future of waste management in Seychelles

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A group of postgraduate students from ETH Zurich, in Switzerland, and undergraduate students from the University of Seychelles (UniSey) yesterday revealed their case study findings on waste management options in Seychelles.

This case study follows on a previous similar research conducted by a different group of ETH Zurich and UniSey students in 2016.

Even though the ETH Zurich students began their preliminary research in February 2018, it was only a mere three weeks ago that they arrived in Seychelles to join their UniSey counterparts to start their extensive on-the-field research and data compilation.

The presentation of the study yesterday was carried out in the presence of officials from the Ministry of Environment, Energy and Climate Change, most notably the principal secretary for Environment Alain Decommarmond; chief executive of the Landscape and Waste Management Agency (LWMA) Flavien Joubert as well as other stakeholders in the environment sector.

The students were divided into seven groups each of which had a specific task of identifying: the collection and sorting options in Seychelles, the potential for waste recycling in Seychelles, the feasibility of an incineration plant, the possibility of implementing treatment plans for organic waste, the state of hazardous waste disposal in the country, the financial aspects of the local waste system and how it can be optimised, and lastly how to effectively implement waste management plans.

One of the main points made during the presentations is that a majority of the 151 households surveyed are already engaging in waste sorting behaviour or are willing to start, while the majority of restaurants and retailers surveyed are not willing to become collection points in the sorting system.

It was also determined that Seychelles has a good potential for recycled goods if certain limitations, such as the lack of a functioning collection and sorting system, are properly dealt with.

Also determined attainable by the case study is the development of an incinerator plant, which will burn waste and by default reduce accumulation on the landfill as well as become a source of renewable energy. The students estimated that the investment cost for such a project is around $40-50 million.

The group focusing on financing of the waste management system stated that certain deficiencies include difficulties for LWMA to make sure creditors pay their debts which they have recorded to have accumulated to R30m. The CEO of LWMA, Mr Joubert, denied this figure during his closing remarks.

Meanwhile, the implementation group identified potential barriers for effective implementation of waste management plans and this include, among a long list, lack of political will, lack of involvement, unclear responsibilities and poor communication.

Mariette Dine, an environmental science student at UniSey who was in the implementation working group, says that the experience was enriching and that the case study shows “that there are a lot of people willing to address the problem of waste management but that it seems like there is an absence of communication between different parties involved”.

Her group mate Simon Wahl from EHT Zurich added that their research work built upon that of the previous 2016 group who also identified such similarities.

Danny Nef, who formed part of the 2016 study and who is now a scientific assistant at ETH Zürich's Transdisciplinary lab, says that the difference between the two groups is that his group started its research from scratch.

“Basically we had no idea, so we built up our post-study on nothing. We came here and experienced the system, and had to foremost understand the system. The students in the 2018 group were able to build upon what we gathered two years ago, and in that sense, they were able to conduct a more in-depth analysis.”

Dr Pius Krütli, the director of the Transdisciplinary lab has affirmed that the case study will be compiled into a report which is to be validated by an advisory committee consisting of local experts.