



Keynote Message for the SWAPP Conference 2023

28 November 2023 9am-12nn |Luxent Hotel, Timog Avenue, Quezon City

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning, good mornong, magandang umaga.

I would like to thank the Solid Waste Management Association of the Philippines for organizing this conference; and for inviting me to share Extended Producer Responsibility, or EPR, initiatives in Sweden.

The world is drowning in plastics and non-biodegradable waste. Plastic pollution has emerged as the second most dire threat to the global environment, second to climate change, and is a big contributor to climate change itself, since plastics are made from petroleum.

Sweden is a near zero-waste society where only 1% of trash ends up in landfills and where we aim towards a circular economy. We are able to do so due to a series of policies of the government or public sector and its collaboration with the business sector, academia and civil society, what we call the quadruple helix. Circular economy is an extremely effective tool to reduce resource use within a society while simultaneously cutting the environmental impacts.

Since the 1990s, the Swedish government has implemented a series of policies aimed at reducing waste generation, raising awareness among manufacturers and citizens as well as drastically cutting emissions.

Sweden has targeted households by applying a weight-based waste charge in a bid to incentivize recycling. National laws that ban the landfilling of combustible and organic waste, along with more stringent standards for hazardous waste, landfill, and dangerous incineration imposed by the European Union on all its member states allowed Sweden to drastically reduce emissions and total landfill waste.

High public awareness of the benefits of recycling as well as an efficient collection system are the keys to my country's success. In 2020, 87% of PET plastic bottles and 87% of aluminum cans as well as 61% of all packaging material were recycled. Furthermore, nearly 50% of household waste was turned into energy through waste-to-energy.

Of course, EPR has a major role in a circular economy.

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In 1990, Thomas Lindqvist who is a researcher at Lund University, introduced to the Swedish Ministry of the Environment, the idea of manufacturer's being responsible for their products.

In 1992, he expanded the definition of EPR to encompass an environmental protection strategy to achieve a decreased total environmental impact from a product, by making the manufacturer of a product responsible for the entire life-cycle of the product and especially for the take-back, recycling and the final disposal of it.

Lindqvist's proposal came at a time when several European countries were initiating strategies to improve the end-of-life management of products, which resulted in almost all members of the OECD establishing EPR policies as an approach to pollution prevention and waste minimization. The Swedish parliament adopted the EPR framework in 1993.

**EPR is based on the polluter pays principle.** Which means that the party responsible for the pollution is also responsible for paying for the damage done. It is an integral part of the waste management and collection system which is managed and coordinated by the LGUs. Usually in LGUs you have a one-stop-shop system, to which citizens bring all items they would like to get rid of. At these centers, you can leave items for donation and charity, sort plastics, metal, and paper in different bins for recycling, and leave what can not be recycled for waste to be incinerated and turned into electricity and heat in the waste-to-energy facilities. There is also collection directly at your house of household waste and recycling bins are set-up usually a couple of hundred meters from your house so that it is easy to leave these items while going to work or school.

Innovation plays an important part in Sweden through both the public and the private sector investing a lot in R&D, more than 3.5 % of our goes to R&D annually. And to encourage innovation, financial instruments such as incentives are also put in place.

. As regards to EPR, there are incentives in place for producers to incorporate environmental considerations in the design of their products with the end of life in mind. In practice, companies or producers work collectively to exert this responsibility by setting up Producer Responsibility Organisations or PROs. In Sweden, the PROs are not-for-profit companies.

How are EPR schemes financed in Sweden? Depending on the product group, the schemes can be financed through product fees that are added onto the retail price; and/or income from the sale of the recycled material.

These economic transactions are administrated by individual PROs that have a unified responsibility for the collection, treatment and the full economic responsibility of a particular product type.

Companies that manufacture or import any type of packaging, or goods wrapped in packaging, are mandated to be registered as "producers" under the Environment Protection Agency. The same agency is in charge of accrediting the PROs.

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Let me share how EPR is applied to the most common types of waste.

### Packaging waste and newsprint

Packaging waste and newsprint were the first product groups to be covered by an EPR. It was established in 1994, but products and materials with a high economic value, such as newsprint, glass packaging and end-of-life vehicles had already been collected for many years prior. The motivation had been mainly economic. Collecting waste products and recycling these were less resource demanding and more profitable than making new products from virgin materials.

### Deposit systems for PET bottles and cans

Drinking bottles and cans are exempt from the packaging ordinance and are instead covered by an ordinance for a return system for PET-bottles and metal cans. This collection system differs from the other types of EPRs in that the consumer pays a deposit at purchase and receives a cashback on the return of the product.

### Glass

Glass packaging was the first product group to have an organized collection. The municipalities had an interest in a separate collection of glass to improve the health and safety of the waste collectors, who were at risk of getting cuts from broken glass in the garbage bags. A system of special bins for glass was implemented and placed at strategic locations, such as outside shops and parking lots. These locations later became the foundation in the system of green recycling stations, adopted by the packaging and newsprint PRO.

### Electric and electronic waste

In the 90s, many municipalities had a separate collection of electronic waste and organised manual disassembling. This also provided job opportunities for people outside of the regular labour market. When the recycling industry got interested in the economic value of the electronic waste, they started industrial-scale recycling and the municipalities sent the collected electrical waste to them. This means that when the EPR was implemented in 1994, there was already an existing collection system in place as well a market for recycling the products.

So, what are the elements of success for implementing EPR?

First, I would say it is the quadruple helix in action. There is a high level of trust and cooperation between the producers and the PROs, and a mutual willingness to fulfill their respective obligations. There is also close cooperation between municipalities and the waste producers, whose work includes structured communication towards the households, and this has created a willingness for households to participate in collection schemes.

Importantly, the producers understand that creating, importing, and putting out any type of product entails a cost to them, and hence they have an incentive to minimize

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those costs through better product design. Producers are also incentivized through material or product taxes or subsidies.

The second factor in a successful EPR model is the equilibrium in supply and demand. Good quality of the waste streams, for example, separate collection of colored and clear glass or newsprint and paper packaging. This creates a high quality of recycled materials with market demand.

Thirdly, we continue to set ambitious targets for waste recycling and materials collection. We can do this since the industry has the operational and financial responsibility for collection, sorting and recycling.

I will also mention briefly how Sweden is dealing with single use plastics.

Due to the PROs, the extensive recycling, end-user responsibilities and the waste-to-energy facilities, the industry has to a large extent self-regulated itself when it comes to plastics. I can hardly remember when I last used a single use plastic item in Sweden since the take out and fast food industry has moved into other materials such as paper and wood. Nevertheless, there still was a legal gap to be filled so only two years ago in November 2021 the Swedish government decided to implement the EU Single-Use Plastics Directive. In 2022, single use plastic cutlery was banned.

The government will also enact modifications that go beyond the directive, such as:

- In 2024, disposable cups containing more than 15% plastic will not be allowed in Sweden
- In 2025, bottles up to three liters made PET must contain at least 25% recycled plastic.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have mostly been successful implementing EPR, but of course we are also facing challenges today.

We see a declining demand in recycled plastics, since it is still relatively cheaper to use plastic made from raw materials (coal, petrol) than recycled materials.

Since plastic packaging can consist of different types of materials with different characteristics, many consumers still lack knowledge about sorting plastic packaging. So more educational and public information campaigns are needed there.

Moreover, the recycling discourse is many times targeted towards consumers, but an equally important actor is the companies and their recycling process.

We can also see these challenges in the Philippines. SWAPPCon is a fantastic avenue to discuss and find solutions to implement moving forward. Swedish company TetraPak will be in the discussion tomorrow and give examples of how they implement EPR within their operations. We also have many other Swedish companies here in the Philippines with internal recycling or circular economy schemes within their operations, such as IKEA, H&M and many industrial companies.

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In ending, I would like to thank the Sweden Alumni Network for being engaged in a crucial topic such as solid waste management; particularly *Dr. Marlon Era, Leslie Suntay, Zyra Oliman, and Bong Madriaga* who will share their experiences and expertise during this conference.

Thank you, tack, maraming salamat.

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