Yuyun Ismawati
BaliFokus

Yuyun Ismawati is being honored with the 2009 Goldman Environmental Prize for her groundbreaking work to create an environmentally sound, community-based solid waste management program in Indonesia. An environmental engineer by training, Yuyun Ismawati recognized that waste is in fact a valuable resource—full of recyclable and compostable materials that the community could use. Just as important, she saw the potential of empowering informal sector recyclers (wastepickers) through more organized waste collection efforts that create jobs that provide dignity and economic security. The programs she has helped to develop are thriving.

Carbon credits threaten groundbreaking program

Yet even as Yuyun's work is being recognized internationally, the worker-owned and managed solid waste cooperative she fostered in Denpasar, Bali is being threatened by the GALFAD (Gasification, Landfill Gas, Anaerobic Digestion) project – a waste-to-energy incinerator and landfill gas system that will receive carbon credits from the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol.

Despite the CDM's ostensible mission of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and promoting sustainable development, the GALFAD project will actually increase GHG emissions. Project proponents claim that it will avoid the release of methane, which results from the breakdown of organic waste in landfills. Yet most organic waste in Bali is fed to pigs; the GALFAD project would take that waste from farmers to throw it into the landfill in order to *purposefully increase methane generation*. Some portion of these emissions would then be captured and burned in order to claim carbon credits, while the rest escapes into the atmosphere.

Waste-to-energy plants *increase* greenhouse gas emissions

This case is typical of the CDM's interventions in the municipal waste sector; its carbon credits have gone almost exclusively to incineration and landfill gas projects rather than to more environmentally sound recycling and composting efforts.

While promoters claim that waste-to-energy incineration turns trash into energy in an environmentally friendly way, the reality is that *incinerators rely on destroying readily recyclable materials, and emit more carbon dioxide per unit of electricity produced than coal-fired power plants.* Incinerators also emit indirect greenhouse gases and endanger public health. Similarly, the landfill gas projects rely on a steady stream of rotting organic matter, competing with better uses for the organics, such as compost and animal feed.

In contrast, recycling and composting programs like those supported by Yuyun and BaliFokus avoid toxic emissions, reduce the need to extract new natural resources, create dignified employment, and create value in the community. *The GALFAD project will not only increase greenhouse gas emissions and toxic pollution, but will also displace the highly successful community-based waste program, destroying the livelihoods of some of the most vulnerable workers.*

As Yuyun explains, "It's not just about quantity. It's about the quality of people's lives, their dignity, and the respect they get in society. When people are empowered, they can solve their own problems."

Act locally and globally

People-centered initiatives similar to Yuyun's, which emphasize livelihoods and the environment, are coming up all over the world. Wherever you are, a local initiative can use your support – or needs to be started. At the same time, these real solutions are being threatened by carbon credits given to "waste-to-energy" projects. Tell your legislators and government officials to oppose subsidies for false solutions. Please contact GAIA (the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives) at (510) 883-9490 x101 or neil@no-burn.org for information about how to connect to local, national and global solutions.

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For more information about Yuyun Ismawati's work, visit **www.balifokus.org**.

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For more information about similar efforts in the US and around the world, visit **www.globalgaia.org**.