



SIAN CUFFY-YOUNG

Waste Management
Educator, Consultant
and Social
Entrepreneur

Green with envy? Sian's work on environmental sustainability on the tropical island nation of Trinidad and Tobago sounds very inviting: she is a Colorado Certified Environmental Educator running her waste education programme in schools and also helping the local business sector to become more waste efficient, to communicate their environmental strategies and train their staff. Sian is currently developing an online learning platform for waste management courses at the University of the West Indies and is just publishing her first children's book in a waste literacy series.

Sian came to waste management as the best of us do, by chance that is. After gaining several international environmental engineering and management qualifications, her very first job was in waste management. She transitioned to working in quarry rehabilitation, before a new job opportunity presented itself again in the waste sector, and despite the initial shock, it's now been 14 years of a rewarding career that she loves! And yet, Sian does not stop there....

Most recently Sian founded the for-profit social enterprise: Siel Environmental Services Limited and leading a corporate composting programme collecting organic waste from companies and businesses and turning it into compost. It is a great achievement, firstly bio-waste recycling on the industrial scale is not well established despite the high percentage of biowaste plus the concept of social enterprise is relatively young on the island, so it was a journey just to get set up and running, with very limited options in terms of advice or financing.

Sian looked internationally for assistance, for example to the International Solid Waste Association for technical materials and the United Nations Information Centre, ECLAC. The enterprise is completely self-funded: "from my own pockets and savings", as she describes. Not only professional but personal support is "super, super important" adds Sian. Without the help of a small-business community, "people to talk to who understand this journey and everything that goes with it", and of her husband and family: "I would not be where I am today, I would have just given up many times."

Sian has overcome other obstacles as well: Sian holds impressive high-level relevant qualifications, but began composting from scratch: "nothing beats practical experience," she explains: "in the corporate sector, of course qualifications matter but in this current journey, what matters more is my work." Whilst women have traditionally led environmental care in Trinidad and Tobago, more of the recognition tends to go to men: "For me there was a level of timidity and a lack of self confidence in the beginning but now that has changed significantly."

Sian shares advice for others in the same situation: "Believe in yourself, show up and deliver. Confidence was my biggest hurdle in the beginning and still is to a small extent, but I go on in spite of the fear and nervousness. Perfection is the killer of action - it is better to be done than perfect."

After a year, Sian is ready to scale, and has begun negotiations with the local authorities, where she will use municipal space a process a much a larger quantity of waste (an average of 200 kg per day for starters) a win-win situation all-round: "We should be super proud of our work and shout it from the mountaintops!"