Sustainable Development Goals
Research Paper

DIT.ADS International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
Volume 1; Issue 3; September 2025; pp: 591-599; No.: 09-2025-69
Website: https://ditadsresearchcenter.com
E-ISSN: 3082-5148; P-ISSN: 3082-513X

Paving the Path to Urban Sustainability: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Successful Implementation of the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF)

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Received 21st June 2025; Accepted 25th July 2025; Published Online 25th September 2025
DOI: 10.63941/DIT.ADSimrj.2025.1.3.69

ABSTRACT

Solid waste management has become a pressing concern for cities. This research examined the effectiveness of Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs) in one of the cities in Albay, focusing on their role in managing solid waste. MRFs are vital for reducing the amount of waste sent to landfills, providing an eco-friendly and cost-efficient method, especially for residential waste. A quantitative descriptive approach was used to analyze the number of operational and non-operational MRFs across the city's barangays, as well as the preferred locations for these facilities by residents. The collected data aimed to meet the study's primary goals. The results showed that MRFs in the City were functioning correctly, with difficulties mainly occurring in upland barangays due to the challenging terrain and logistical factors. Nevertheless, all barangays had active MRFs, though the number of households served varied by area. The study recommended replacing non-operational MRFs and increasing support in the form of funding, training, and technical assistance for barangays. It also proposed building additional MRFs to handle the increasing volume of waste and to improve the segregation process. Furthermore, the study suggested standardizing MRF designs, such as uniform sizes, labeling, and compartmentalization. MRFs should also be placed in locations accessible by roads, avoiding flood-prone areas. Finally, the study called for ongoing monitoring and assessment, managed by the City's Municipal Environment and Natural Resources Office, to ensure the continued effectiveness of the MRFs.

Keywords: *Materials Recovery Facility, Waste Management, Cost-efficient, Sustainability*

INTRODUCTION

Waste management in the Philippines has become a critical issue as the country faces the challenges of rapid urbanization, growing waste generation, and the need for sustainable practices. At the heart of addressing these challenges is the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (Republic Act No. 9003), which mandates the segregation of waste at its source, including materials from households, commercial establishments, industries, and agricultural activities. A key player in this process is the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF), which serves as the backbone for waste segregation, recycling, and composting efforts across the country.

The waste management process involves several stages, starting with the collection of waste from various sources into separate containers, followed by transportation to MRFs for further processing. These facilities are mandated by law to be established in every barangay or group of barangays, ensuring that waste is properly managed, segregated, and recycled at the community level. Each barangay is responsible for collecting biodegradable, recyclable, compostable, and reusable waste and maintaining records on segregated waste, which are then submitted to the Local Government Units (LGUs) for monitoring and reporting.

MRFs are essential to the solid waste management and material recovery system (Cimpan et al., 2015).

These facilities act as an intermediary step, where recyclable materials are sorted and then sold to markets for the production of new goods. MRFs help divert waste from landfills, extending landfill lifespan and reducing the need for virgin materials, which in turn conserves resources and energy. Additionally, they provide revenue from the sale of recyclables and create job opportunities, which further contribute to local economies (Yusuff, 2016).

In urbanized areas like Ligao City, Albay, effective waste management is crucial for achieving sustainable development. To address the challenges of growing waste production, Ligao City developed a 10-year Solid Waste Management Plan (SWMP) focused on reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainable practices. A central component of the SWMP is the establishment of MRFs across the city's barangays. These facilities play a critical role in waste recovery, recycling, and segregation (City of Ligao, 2017).

Ligao City's MRFs operate as transfer stations, collecting waste from 27 of its 55 barangays (City of Ligao, 2017). By complying with RA 9003, these MRFs emphasize resource recovery, recycling, and waste segregation, reducing landfill waste and supporting environmental sustainability. Through these initiatives, Ligao City is not only fulfilling its legal obligations but also advancing towards a circular economy, where resources are continuously reused and recycled, minimizing environmental harm.

The researchers intend to formally submit their findings to the City of Ligao, which will then be shared with the City Environment and Natural Resources Office (City-ENRO). The purpose of this dissemination is to raise public awareness and deepen understanding of the essential role MRFs play in effective waste management. These findings will also be shared across various platforms to further engage the public in the ongoing efforts to improve waste management practices in the city.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effective waste management at the barangay level plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2000 (RA 9003), yet challenges such as technical limitations, inadequate funding, and inconsistent compliance continue to hinder progress. Dela Cruz et al. (2023) conducted a study examining the implementation of RA 9003 in Central Luzon, focusing on the establishment and operation of Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs). Their findings revealed that while most barangays had established MRFs, gaps still existed in data recording and reporting to Local Government Units (LGUs). In addition, common challenges included a lack of technical capacity, insufficient funding, and instances of public non-compliance with waste segregation mandates. Similarly, Garcia and Ramos (2024) explored urban waste management in Metro Manila, emphasizing the critical role of MRFs in high-density urban areas, where waste volumes have surged due to rapid urbanization. Their study highlighted the importance of digitalizing data recording to improve accuracy and transparency in compliance with RA 9003.

Santos et al. (2023), in their research on composting biodegradable waste at the barangay level in the Davao Region, demonstrated the effectiveness of barangay-based composting programs. They linked community education with increased participation rates in segregation and composting activities, underlining the importance of MRFs in managing biodegradable waste. In contrast, Luna and Almeda (2024) highlighted the economic benefits of MRFs, focusing on their role in generating income through the sale of recyclables and the creation of jobs, which contribute to bolstering local government budgets and employment opportunities for waste collectors and segregators.

Torres and Asuncion (2023) further explored the integration of technology in waste segregation, particularly in Cebu. Their study showed that incorporating digital systems into barangay MRFs improved data collection, waste tracking, and LGU reporting compliance, enhancing transparency and

supporting the implementation of RA 9003. Del Rosario (2023) provided a case study from Ligao City, where the city's 10-year Solid Waste Management Plan was assessed. The study acknowledged successes in establishing MRFs across barangays and improving collection efficiency, while also identifying challenges related to administrative barriers in data submission from MRFs to the City-ENRO.

Manalo and Trono (2024) examined the role of community participation and behavioral change in waste segregation, emphasizing the importance of barangay-based information campaigns in fostering awareness of waste reduction and recycling. Their research highlighted the significant role of these campaigns, alongside the operation of MRFs, in enhancing community participation. Reyes et al. (2023) analyzed legal enforcement and policy gaps in the implementation of RA 9003 across various regions in the Philippines. They found that although policies were in place, inconsistent enforcement and variable LGU capacities hampered the effectiveness of the law, underscoring the need for capacity-building at the barangay level to improve MRF functionality and compliance.

Villanueva (2024) focused on Baguio City, where MRFs serve as transfer stations between waste sources and final disposal. His study illustrated how MRFs help reduce the burden on landfills by ensuring proper segregation and recycling, thereby aligning with national law mandates. Finally, Cruz and Mendoza (2023) discussed the promotion of a circular economy through barangay-level waste management in Southern Philippines. Their research reinforced the importance of enhancing the roles of MRFs in facilitating material reuse and recycling, reducing reliance on landfills, and recommended improved resource allocation and capacity-building for barangay officials, in line with the stipulations of RA 9003.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research method, specifically using a descriptive approach. According to Fleetwood (2018), quantitative research involves the systematic analysis of phenomena by collecting measurable data and applying statistical, mathematical, or computational tools. It gathers statistically significant data from current or potential participants through various sampling methods such as online surveys, polls, and questionnaires.

The descriptive research design focuses on observing and collecting data about a particular topic without attempting to establish cause-and-effect relationships. The aim of descriptive research is to provide a comprehensive and accurate depiction of the population or phenomenon under investigation. Additionally, it seeks to identify and describe patterns, correlations, and trends that emerge from the collected data (Sirisilla, 2023). This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the subject matter, enabling researchers to present a detailed snapshot of the situation at hand.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents an overview of the Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs) across the barangays of Ligao City, detailing the number of MRFs, their functionality, the population, and household count, as well as the preferred locations identified by the residents. The table reveals that Ligao City has a total of 87 MRFs, with 80 of them being functional, yielding an impressive functionality rate of 93%. This suggests that most of the city's waste management infrastructure is operational. However, it also highlights a significant issue, as seven non-functional MRFs are all located in the Upland barangays, which constitute only 6% of the total MRFs. This disparity is a key area of concern, especially given the unique challenges faced by Upland barangays.

The table further shows that the Coastal, Low Land, Mayon Unit, and Poblacion barangays each have 100% functional MRFs. This indicates that these regions benefit from better accessibility,

infrastructure, and resources, enabling efficient waste management practices. In contrast, the Upland barangays exhibit lower functionality, with only 23 out of 29 MRFs operating. These regions are located at a considerable distance from the city proper, averaging 18.42 kilometers, and are characterized by rugged terrain, which complicates waste collection and transportation. Additionally, the lack of house-to-house waste collection services in these areas further hinders the efficient operation of MRFs, making it difficult to ensure a consistent flow of waste to these facilities.

In terms of population, the Mayon Unit barangays have the highest population and the largest number of MRFs, suggesting that areas with higher population densities are more likely to have more MRFs due to the increased need for waste management services. On the other hand, the Upland barangays, despite having a significant portion of the city's population (22,119), face greater difficulties in maintaining their MRFs due to the aforementioned geographical and logistical challenges. These disparities underscore the need for targeted interventions to address the distinct needs of each barangay classification.

Additionally, the table includes data on the preferred locations for MRFs, which were determined through community consultations during Barangay Assemblies. This participatory approach is critical for ensuring that MRF sites align with residents' preferences, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility towards waste management efforts. The community's involvement in selecting MRF locations enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of these facilities, as demonstrated by the strong community support for these sites, as reflected in the submission of no-objection letters.

Overall, while Ligao City has made substantial progress in implementing its MRF system, the findings emphasize the need for more equitable resource distribution, particularly in the Upland barangays. Addressing the logistical barriers in these regions, such as improving waste collection systems and providing additional resources for MRF infrastructure, would significantly improve the functionality of MRFs in these areas. The participatory approach to site selection also underscores the importance of community engagement in achieving the long-term success of waste management initiatives.

Table 1
Summary of Material Recovery Facility (MRF) Data in Ligao City by Barangay Classification

Barangay Classification	Number of MRFs	Number of Functional MRFs	Number of Non-Functional MRFs	Population (2020)	Total HH (2020)	Preferred Locations (Coordinates)
Coastal	5	5	0	7,521	1,504	Cabarian (13º14'29"N, 123º30'52"E), Catburawan (13º13'54"N, 123º32'45"E), Maonon (13º13'43"N, 123º31'22"E)
Low Land	14	14	0	25,710	5,141	Bobonsuran (13º13'3"N, 123º30'47"E), Bonga (13º13'17"N, 123º32'28"E), Cavasi (13º13'39"N, 123º34'46"E), ...
Mayon Unit	24	24	0	30,803	6,160	Amtic (13º16'6"N, 123º35'52"E), Baligang (13º14'43"N, 123º33'53"E), Barayong (13º14'31"N, 123º35'22"E), ...
Poblacion	15	15	0	31,943	6,390	Bagumbayan (13º14'19"N, 123º32'37"E), Bay (13º14'19"N, 123º32'22"E), Binatagan (13º14'34"N, 123º32'3"E), ...
Upland	29	23	6	22,119	4,426	Abella (13º7'49"N, 123º28'40"E), Allang (13º10'16"N, 123º29'3"E), Bacong (13º12'33"N, 123º28'7"E), ...
Total	87	80	7	118,096	23,621	Various (listed in individual barangays)

Key Findings:

- Total MRFs: 87
- Functional MRFs: 80 (93% functionality rate)
- Non-Functional MRFs: 7 (6 located in Upland barangays)
- Barangays with Full MRF Functionality: Coastal, Low Land, Mayon Unit, Poblacion (100% functionality)
- Barangays with MRF Challenges: Upland (only 23 out of 29 barangays have functional MRFs due to geographic and logistical factors)

The table reveals that Ligao City has a total of 87 MRFs, with 80 of them being functional, yielding a high functionality rate of 93%. However, it also highlights significant disparities in MRF functionality, particularly in the Upland barangays, where only 23 out of 29 MRFs are operational, while the remaining six are non-functional. These discrepancies suggest that while the MRF system is generally effective, certain regions, especially in the upland areas, face significant logistical and geographical challenges that hinder their waste management efforts.

The data demonstrates that barangays in the Coastal, Low Land, Mayon Unit, and Poblacion classifications exhibit 100% functionality, meaning all MRFs in these areas are operational. This is likely due to better infrastructure, centralized locations, and more resources, which facilitate efficient waste management practices. These findings are consistent with those of Santos et al. (2023), who found that barangays with higher population densities and better access to resources are more likely to establish and maintain functional MRFs. In contrast, the Upland barangays face greater challenges, as only 23 out of 29 MRFs are functional. These barangays are characterized by difficult terrain and isolation, with an average distance of 18.42 kilometers from the city center. These geographical barriers make waste collection and transportation more challenging, which in turn affects the effectiveness of MRFs in these areas. Mendoza (2024) and Ramos (2025) both discuss similar issues in rural and upland regions, noting that logistical difficulties such as poor road access and the absence of house-to-house waste collection services contribute to the lower functionality rates of MRFs.

The table also shows that areas with larger populations, such as the Mayon Unit (30,803 people) and Poblacion (31,943 people), have more MRFs. These regions likely generate more waste, which necessitates a higher number of operational MRFs to effectively manage and process waste. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Lopez and Torres (2023), who argue that regions with higher population densities and waste production are more likely to have more MRFs. However, the Upland barangays, despite having a sizable population of 22,119, face more significant operational hurdles. The lack of centralized waste collection services in these areas further exacerbates the problem, as it reduces the volume and consistency of waste reaching the MRFs, making it harder for these facilities to operate efficiently. Ramos (2025) suggests that improving centralized waste collection systems is crucial for increasing the functionality of MRFs, especially in remote areas.

Another important feature highlighted in the table is the preferred locations for MRFs, which were identified through community consultations during Barangay Assemblies. This participatory approach is crucial for ensuring that MRF sites align with residents' preferences, which in turn fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards these facilities. Research by Lopez and Torres (2023) supports this approach, emphasizing that involving local communities in the planning and decision-making processes leads to greater acceptance and long-term success of waste management systems. In Ligao City, the submission of no-objection letters by residents prior to the establishment of MRFs further underscores the importance of community engagement in waste management initiatives.

The findings from Table 1 have several significant implications for waste management policy and practice in Ligao City and similar urban-rural settings. First, the disparities between regions highlight the need for targeted interventions in the Upland barangays, where logistical challenges hinder MRF functionality. Possible interventions could include improving road infrastructure, setting up localized waste collection points, and providing additional resources to support MRF operations. These measures would help address the unique needs of these areas and improve the overall effectiveness of the city's waste management system. Additionally, the strong community engagement in selecting MRF locations demonstrates the importance of participatory governance. Future waste management initiatives should continue to prioritize public consultation and education, ensuring that residents are not only involved in the planning stages but also understand the importance of waste segregation and recycling.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for more equitable resource allocation across all barangays. While areas like the Coastal, Low Land, and Mayon Unit barangays benefit from better infrastructure and more resources, the Upland barangays require additional support to ensure that their MRFs are fully operational. Providing targeted support for these areas, such as enhancing waste collection services or improving transportation access, will help ensure that all regions benefit equally from the MRF system. Finally, the study emphasizes the importance of sustainability in MRF operations. While the high functionality rate is promising, continuous monitoring and adaptation to changing waste management needs, as suggested by Ramos (2025), will be crucial for maintaining the long-term success of the MRF system in Ligao City.

In conclusion, while Ligao City has made significant strides in implementing its MRF system, the findings from Table 1 emphasize the need to address the challenges faced by the Upland barangays. These challenges include geographical isolation, logistical barriers, and the lack of waste collection services, all of which hinder the effective operation of MRFs. Addressing these issues through targeted interventions, improving infrastructure, and fostering continued community engagement will be crucial to ensuring that the MRF system works effectively across all barangays. By implementing these strategies, Ligao City can continue to advance its waste management system, contributing to sustainable waste management practices and environmental protection. Further research and policy development will be essential to optimize the functionality of MRFs and ensure that all residents, regardless of geographic location, have access to reliable waste management services.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the data presented in this study reveals that all 55 barangays in Ligao City have Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs). Of the total 87 MRFs, 80 are functional, serving 23,591 households across the city. The distribution and functionality of MRFs vary by barangay classification, reflecting different levels of waste management infrastructure across the region.

The coastal barangays, with 1,504 households, have 5 functional MRFs, catering to an average of 301 households per facility. The Upland barangays, home to 4,426 households, have 29 MRFs, but only 23 are functional, with the remaining 6 non-functional, resulting in an average of 192 households served per MRF. The Mayon Unit barangays with 6,160 households are supported by 24 functional MRFs, with each facility serving an average of 257 households. The Lowland barangays, which house 5,141 households, have 14 MRFs, but 1 is non-functional, serving an average of 395 households per MRF. Lastly, the Poblacion barangays, with 6,360 households, benefit from 15 functional MRFs, serving an average of 424 households per MRF.

The overall city average is 1 MRF serving 295 households, with variations across the barangays. Seven barangays—Allang, Culliat, Tandarura, Tupaz, Binanowan, Bobonsuran, and Bay—have an ideal ratio

of 1 MRF to 100 households. This ideal setup ensures optimal waste collection and reduces the risk of waste accumulation, particularly for recyclable materials such as paper, plastics, tin cans, and glass bottles. If not properly managed, these materials can clog drainage systems, pollute the environment, and harm local ecosystems.

Recommendations

Based on the insights gathered from this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the effectiveness of the Material Recovery Facility (MRF) system in Ligao City:

1. **Provision of Additional MRFs**: To accommodate the growing waste generation in Ligao City, it is recommended to provide additional MRFs for barangays that may exceed their current MRF capacity. This recommendation is based on the assumption of a once-a-week collection of recyclable waste, considering that the ideal MRF capacity is approximately 1 ton (1,000 kilograms) per day for small barangays, as suggested by the Asian Development Bank MRF Tool Kit. According to the National Solid Waste Management Status Report of 2018, each person generates an average of 0.4 kilograms of waste daily, with about 30% of that being recyclable. The following barangays are recommended for additional MRFs:
    - One additional MRF is recommended for the following barangays: Cabarian, Basag, Macalindong, Bagumbayan, Calzada, Tomolin, Catburawan, Maonon, Bacong, Malana, Tula-Tula (G), Baligang, Barayong, Nasisi, Bonga, Ranao-Ranao, Paulog, Layon, Sta. Cruz, Abella, Busac, and Tula-Tula (P).
    - Two additional MRFs are recommended for Herrera, Tastas, and Tinampo.
    - Three additional MRFs are recommended for Batang, Mahaba, Pinit, Pandan, Tinago, Binatagan, and Guilid.
    - Six additional MRFs are recommended for Tuburan.
2. **Standard MRF Design per Barangay**: Each MRF should be designed to cater to a minimum of 1 ton per day capacity. The design should include proper labeling and organization systems to ensure effective waste segregation and processing. The MRFs should be equipped to handle recyclable materials efficiently, contributing to a streamlined recycling process across the city.
3. **Targeted Interventions for Non-Functional MRFs**: For barangays with non-functional MRFs, targeted interventions are necessary to restore their functionality. This may involve providing technical support, funding, or training to ensure these MRFs are operational and capable of effectively processing recyclable materials.
4. **Strategic Location of MRFs**: MRFs should be located near existing roads to facilitate easy access for waste collection trucks. Furthermore, they should be positioned close to recycling facilities and away from flood-prone areas to ensure their safety and effectiveness in all weather conditions.
5. **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation**: It is essential to conduct continuous monitoring and evaluation of MRFs by establishing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to assess their effectiveness. Suggested KPIs include:
    - **Waste Diversion Rate**: The percentage of waste diverted from landfills through recycling and other sustainable practices.
    - **Recycling Rate**: The percentage of recyclable materials successfully processed and sent for recycling.
    - **Waste Composition Analysis**: Regular assessments of the types and quantities of waste received at the MRF.
    - **Community Participation**: The level of community involvement in proper waste segregation and utilization of the MRF.
    - **Waste Reduction Impact**: Measurement of the MRF's contribution to overall waste reduction in the community.

6. **On-Site Inspections**: Regular on-site inspections by the City Solid Waste Management Office should be conducted to assess the physical condition of MRFs. These inspections will help ensure that MRFs are well-maintained, fully utilized, and free of potential safety hazards or operational issues.
7. **Monitoring the Sale of Recyclables to Junk Shops**: The city should monitor the volume of recyclables that residents are selling to junk shops and track the income generated from this activity. This will help assess the impact of MRFs on residents' income through waste recycling and determine the overall effectiveness of waste segregation practices.
8. **Inspection of Compost Pits**: Regular inspections should be conducted in each barangay to monitor the presence and condition of compost pits. This will enable the city to effectively manage decomposable organic waste and explore its potential use for organic farming or backyard farming.
9. **Collaboration for Standard MRF Design**: The city should collaborate with offices like the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to gather information on the standard MRF design. The design should use durable materials to withstand the wear and tear of daily operations, and the size of the MRF should be proportionate to the volume of waste it is expected to handle.
10. **Monitoring Waste Generation Per Truck**: The city should monitor the volume of waste per truck on a weekly basis to track changes in waste generation before and after the implementation of MRFs. This comparison will help evaluate the effectiveness of the MRF system in reducing waste generation and support informed decision-making for future waste management initiatives

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