

Study Guide

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Forum: Environmental committee

Issue: The mass ocean pollution caused by the South Asia countries

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Position: Chair, under chair

Introduction

The world has been dramatically changed as a result of the introduction of plastic, used for everything from packaging to products, plastic has invaded the seas and fills landmines around the world.

While many countries still have a problem with litter, there are at least regular collections of waste and recyclable materials. The point is not that richer nations don't need to address their use of plastic – they do – but that the benefits “per dollar” are much greater in poorer countries where even minimal interventions would make a huge difference. Therefore there is now a moral and environmental case for using aid money to support better waste management in poorer countries.

A recent report by the Chartered Institute of Waste Managers and the UK-based NGO WasteAid claims that mismanaged waste from developing countries accounts for up to 70% of ocean plastic by weight. Just five countries in East Asia are responsible for most of this. Meanwhile 38 out of 50 of the world's largest uncontrolled dump sites are in coastal areas and many of them spill waste directly into the sea. So to clear up marine plastics, we firstly have to address waste management in poorer countries. Doing so could halve the quantity of plastics entering the oceans worldwide.

Helping poorer countries deal with ever-increasing amounts of plastic and other waste is ultimately a core development issue – and one squarely within the remit of government ministries such as the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) or international organisations such as the World Bank. It is much better to deal with plastic at the point it becomes waste, rather than attempt to salvage it later from the ocean. Treatment of waste is specifically mentioned in three of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, after all. And waste also has an impact on many other UN goals, such as reducing poverty, improving health and equality, providing clean energy, cleaner cities and healthier populations and – last but not least – the protection of air, land and water from pollution damage.

Definition of Key terms

Developing countries (Third World countries)

A developing country (less economically developed country (LEDC), or underdeveloped country) is a country with a less developed industrial base and a low Human Development Index (HDI) relative to other countries. However, this definition is not universally agreed upon. There is also no clear agreement on which countries fit

this category. A nation's GDP per capita compared with other nations can be a reference point. Developing countries include, in decreasing order of economic growth or size of the capital market: newly industrialized countries, emerging markets, frontier markets, least developed countries. Therefore, the least developed countries are the poorest of the developing countries. The term "Third World" arose during the Cold War to define countries that remained non-aligned with either NATO or the Communist Bloc. The United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Western European nations and their allies represented the First World, while the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and their allies represented the Second World. This terminology provided a way of broadly categorizing the nations of the Earth into three groups based on political and economic divisions.

The Third World was normally seen to include many countries with colonial pasts in Africa, Latin America, Oceania and Asia.

Developed countries

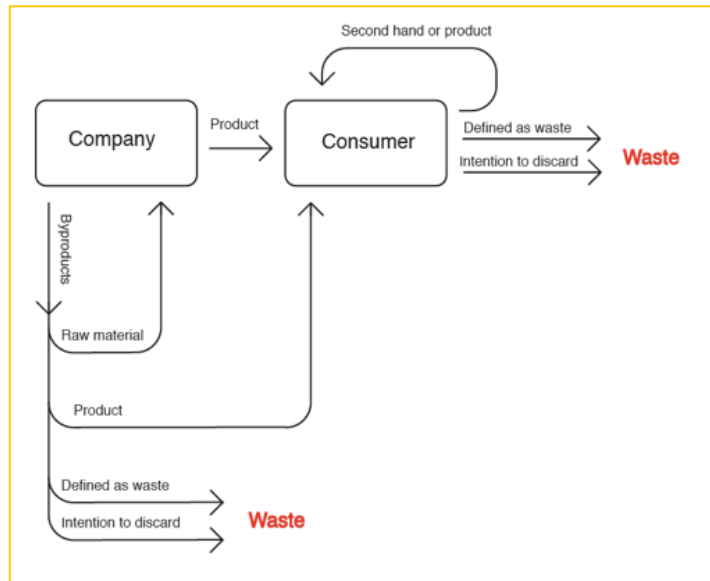
A developed country, industrialized country, more developed country, or more economically developed country (MEDC), is a sovereign state that has a developed economy and advanced technological infrastructure relative to other less industrialized nations. Most commonly, the criteria for evaluating the degree of economic development are gross domestic product (GDP), gross national product (GNP), the per capita income, level of industrialization, amount of widespread infrastructure and general standard of living. Which criteria are to be used and which countries can be classified as being developed are subjects of debate. Developed countries have generally post-industrial economies, meaning the service sector provides more wealth than the industrial sector. They are contrasted with developing countries, which are in the process of industrialization or pre-industrial and almost entirely agrarian, some of which might fall into the category of least developed countries. As of 2015, advanced economies comprise 60.8% of global GDP based on nominal values and 42.9% of global GDP based on purchasing-power parity (PPP) according to the International Monetary Fund. In 2017, the ten largest advanced economies by GDP in both nominal and PPP terms were Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

South Asia countries

The current territories of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka form South Asia. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an economic cooperation organisation in the region which was established in 1985 and includes all eight nations comprising South Asia.

Waste

Waste (or wastes) are unwanted or unusable materials. Waste is any substance which is discarded after primary use, or is worthless, defective and of no use. Examples include municipal solid waste (household trash/refuse), hazardous waste, wastewater (such as sewage, which contains bodily wastes (feces and urine) and surface runoff), radioactive waste, and others.



Schematic illustration of the EU Legal definition of waste

Waste management

Waste management (or waste disposal) are the activities and actions required to manage waste from its inception to its final disposal. This includes the collection, transport, treatment and disposal of waste, together with monitoring and regulation of the waste management process. Waste can be solid, liquid, or gaseous and each type has different methods of disposal and management. Waste management deals with all types of waste, including industrial, biological and household. In some cases waste can pose a threat to human health. Waste is produced by human activity, for example the extraction and processing of raw materials. Waste management is intended to reduce adverse effects of waste on human health, the environment or aesthetics. Waste management practices are not uniform among countries (developed and developing nations); regions (urban and rural areas), and residential and industrial sectors can all take different approaches. A large portion of waste management practices deal with municipal solid waste (MSW) which is the bulk of the waste that is created by household, industrial, and commercial activity.

Ocean pollution

Marine pollution occurs when harmful effects result from the entry into the ocean of chemicals, particles, industrial, agricultural, and residential waste, noise, or the spread of invasive organisms. Eighty percent of marine pollution comes from land. Nonpoint source pollution includes many small sources, like septic tanks, cars, trucks, and boats, plus larger sources, such as farms, livestock ranches, and timber harvest areas. Pollution that comes from a single source, like an oil or chemical spill, is known as point source pollution. Often these events have large impacts, but fortunately, they occur less often. Discharge from faulty or damaged factories or water treatment systems is also considered point source pollution.

Sweatshops

Sweatshop (or sweat factory) is a pejorative term for a workplace that has very poor, socially unacceptable working conditions. The work may be difficult, dangerous, climatically challenged or underpaid. Workers in sweatshops may work long hours with low pay, regardless of laws mandating overtime pay or a minimum wage; child labor laws may also be violated. The Fair Labor Association's "2006 Annual Public Report" inspected factories for FLA compliance in 18 countries including Bangladesh, El Salvador, Colombia, Guatemala, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, China, India, Vietnam, Honduras, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, and the US. The U.S. Department of Labor's "2015 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor" found that "18 countries did not meet the International Labour Organization's recommendation for an adequate number of inspectors."

Background information

Amount of waste produced

India alone generate more than 1,00,000 metric tonnes of solid waste every day, which is higher than many countries' total daily waste generation taken together, Y S Chowdary, minister of state of science and Technology said at an Assocham event held in New Delhi.

“Large metropolis such as Mumbai and Delhi generate around 9,000 metric tonnes and 8,300 metric tonnes of waste per day, respectively. India suffers from inefficient and insufficient waste infrastructure and also from increasing rates of solid waste generation per capita. Issues of service quality and waste quantity need to be handled together. Besides, the infrastructure and technologies, we must also concede that we have not addressed the issue from a systemic perspective,” said Chowdary, inaugurating an Assocham Conference on 5th national conference and awards on waste to wealth.

Waste management in South Asia

Solid waste management is already a significant concern for municipal governments across South Asia. It constitutes one of their largest costs and the problem is growing year on year as urban populations swell. As with all waste management experiences, we have learned lessons and can see scope for improvement. There are two factors which have a significant impact on the costs and viability of a waste management system as it relates to collection and transportation: first, the distance travelled between collection and disposal point; and second, the extent to which ‘wet’ kitchen waste can be kept separate from dry waste much of which can be recycled. Separating waste in this way reduces the costs of manual sorting later on, and increases the prices for recyclable materials. In many larger towns distances become too great for door-to-door collectors to dispose waste directly at the dump site. Arrangements are made to dispose of waste at secondary storage points (large skips) provided by the municipality. However, where these are not regularly emptied, the waste is likely to be spread beyond the bins, creating a further environmental hazard. Ideally, and if

suitable land can be found, a number of smaller waste disposal sites located around a town would eliminate this problem. With significant public awareness efforts on our part, and continual daily reminders to home-owners, we were able to raise the rate of household separation to about 60%, but once these reminders became less frequent, the rate dropped rapidly back to around 25%. The problem is compounded in larger cities by the unavailability of separated secondary storage bins, so everything is mixed up again at this point anyway, despite the best efforts of householders. If rates are to be sustained, it requires continual and on-going promotion in the long term. The cost of this has to be weighed against the financial benefit of cleaner separated waste and reduced sorting costs. Our experience in Sri Lanka shows how important a role the Local Authority can play in continuing to promote good solid waste management practices at the household level.

Environmental pollution

Not only workers are impacted by sweatshops, but the neighboring environment as well, through lax environmental laws set up in developing countries to help reduce the production cost of the fashion industry. Clothing manufacturing is still one of the most polluting industries in the world. Nevertheless, the environment of developing countries remained deeply polluted by the untreated waste. The Buriganga River in Bangladesh is now black in colour and pronounced biologically dead because neighbouring leather tanneries are discharging more than 150 cubics of liquid waste daily. (Stanko, 2013) The daily life of local people is significantly affected as Buriganga River is their source of bathing, irrigation and transportation. Many workers in the tanneries suffer from serious skin illness since they are exposed to toxic chemicals for long period of time. Air is being highly polluted in such area because the factories do not install proper ventilation facilities. Sweatshops is also an environmental issue as it is not only causing harm to the human right of labour but also their living environment.

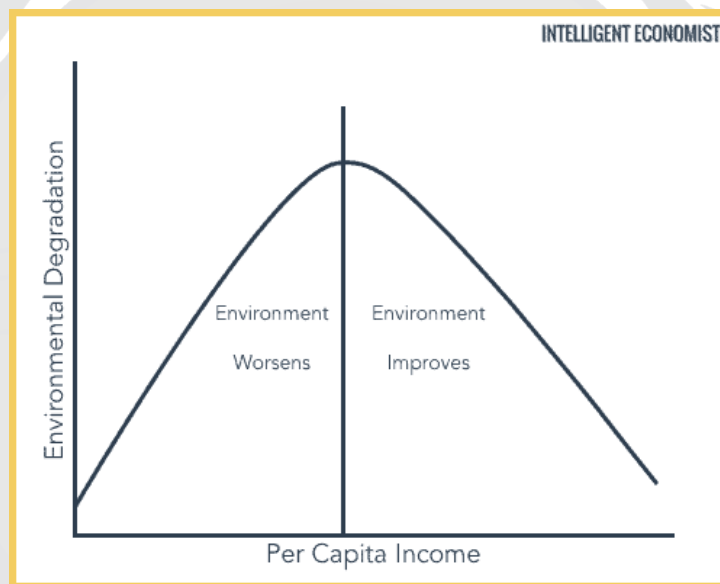
The Environmental Kuznets Curve

The Environmental Kuznets Curve is used to graph the idea that as an economy develops, market forces begin to increase and economic inequality decreases. More specifically that as the economy grows, initially the environment suffers but eventually the relationship between the environment and the society improves. The theory suggests that as a nation is going through industrialization, and mechanization of agriculture – the nation's economy will naturally move towards cities. Inequality is expected to decrease when rural populations move towards urban cities. The Environmental Kuznets Curve adheres to the same idea of the hypothesized relationship between equality and development. The difference is that it looks at environment equality. Before the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis, it was generally assumed that rich economies destroyed the environment at a faster pace than poorer countries. However, with the Environmental Kuznets Curve, the relationship between the environment's health and the economy has been reanalyzed. The idea is that as economic development growth occurs, the environment will worsen until a certain point where the country reaches a specific average income. Then money is invested back into the environment, and the ecosystem is restored. Critics argue that

economic growth doesn't always lead to a better environment and sometimes the opposite may actually be true.

Implications of the Environmental Kuznets Curve:

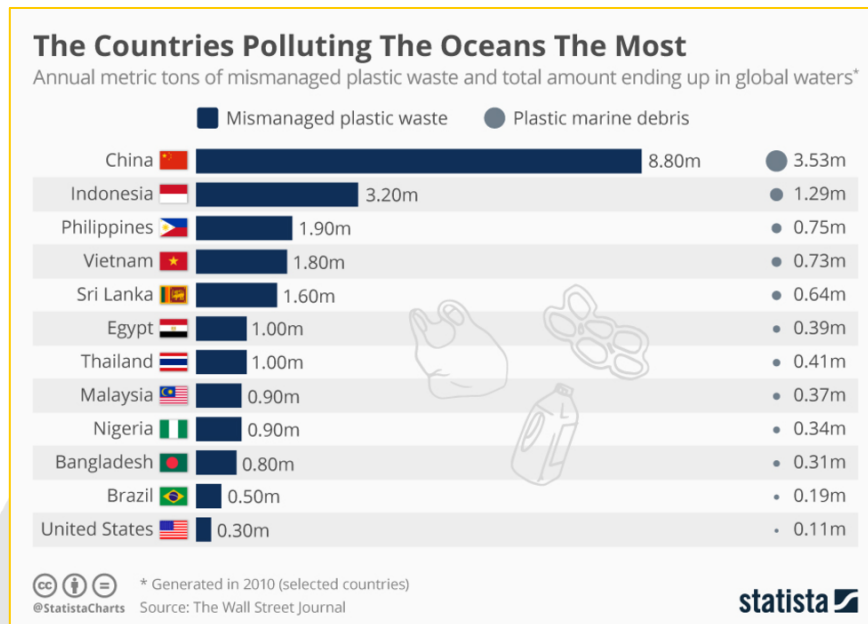
1. When an economy is primarily pre-industrial and agrarian, the environment is usually clean and untouched by pollutants from industrial economic activities.
2. As the economy shifts towards development and industrialization, the environment is at a higher risk of being harmed by pollution and depletion of natural resources.
3. The curve then returns to a cleaner environment when economic growth continues, and people choose to spend their incomes on improving the environment by cleaning water and improving air quality. People become more aware of the benefits to the environment.



There are apparently many limitations to the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis. However, there have been several studies to show that specific environmental issues do follow the Kuznets Curve. These include air and water pollutants such as quantities of sulfur dioxide, suspended particulate matter, and fecal coliform. Of course, it is difficult to make general statements as the Environmental Kuznets Curve relationship is dependent on the specific pollutant, the place, and what time frame. For example, economies often require regulation and government intervention to ensure that the environment is being protected, even as income levels rise. As Economists conduct more studies, we will be able to reach a better understanding of what changes we can make to benefit both the environment and the economy.

Major countries and organisations involved

As the focus on ocean pollution and how to stem the flow of plastic into the sea increases, the heat is on for the countries that are most responsible for the garbage in our waters



Behind China was Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Sri Lanka. The United States made the list at 12th, with 110,000 tons of ocean waste. Those figures came from a 2010 study, but they've stayed consistent over the years. According to Forbes, a 2017 report by the Ocean Conservancy found that China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam were responsible for the majority of the ocean's plastic pollution. The reason why Asian countries contribute the most waste to the seas is twofold.

For one, according to Forbes, Asian countries are using a massive amount of single-use plastics, like cutlery and packaging. "We've been so hardwired in Asia to prioritize convenience above all else," said Alvin Li, cofounder of the sustainable products company Kommon Goods. That convenience has led to a lot of garbage, and that garbage isn't being disposed of properly.

The other reason that there's so much garbage in Asia, is because other countries are putting it there. According to the Huffington Post, up until China put a stop to it in January 2018, the Asian nation was importing waste from around the globe. The outlet reported that, in 2016, half of the world's plastic, paper and metal was exported to China for processing. The United States alone contributed 16 million tons that year. So, the U.S. may not be on the top of the pollution list, but that's because it has been contributing to the problem overseas.

Several G7 countries signed an Ocean Plastics Charter in 2018, pledging to reduce ocean pollution significantly by 2030. The countries on that list include, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the European Union. Japan and the U.S. declined to sign. No other Asian countries are in the G7.

1. Ocean Conservancy

Founded in 1972, Ocean Conservancy is a Washington, D.C. based leading advocacy group working for the protection of special marine habitats, the restoration of sustainable fisheries and most importantly, for reducing the human impact on ocean ecosystems. In order to save our oceans, the group focuses on educating the public and also advocating for policy changes for maintaining vibrant ocean wildlife. Among Ocean Conservancy's several efforts, International Coastal Cleanup programme- which the group has been hosting for over 30 years- brings millions of volunteers together to clean beaches across the world. The organization was initially known as the Delta Conservancy and later the Center for Environmental Education and the Center for Marine Conservation before receiving its current name.

2. Surfrider Foundation

Surfrider Foundation is a grassroots non-profit environmental organisation dedicated to the protection of oceans and beaches around the world. Recognising the challenges that Ocean facing from pollution, offshore development and climate change, the California-based group acts on issues such as water quality, plastic pollution, beach access, coastal preservation and sustaining marine and coastal ecosystems. According to the group, its volunteers test the ocean waters all year long in order to make sure that the public is educated on their local water quality. Further, under its Ocean Friendly Gardens program, they also make beautiful landscapes that collect runoff before it reaches the ocean

3. Natural Resources Defense Council

New York City-based Natural Resources Defense Council is a non-profit international environmental advocacy group works to protect the oceans from pollution and exploitation. The organisation supports the implementation of laws that help to save the marine life including allowing overfished species to rebound. In addition, the council takes necessary efforts to preserve ocean treasures, prevent destructive fishing practices and protect coastal communities from offshore drilling, among others.

Possible solutions

In our committee, we want to focus on an international aid programme which should be established to develop waste management and recycling infrastructure in developing countries. Find the ways how to stop a huge amount of waste from entering the ocean, as it is easier and cheaper way than removing it afterwards.

Delegates should be focusing on countries which are either polluting or are contributing to this pollution, whether directly by supporting practices that leads to waste entering rivers, seas and oceans, or indirectly by importing goods from these countries instead of using their own products.

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