



**Practical
ACTION**

PLASTIC WASTE IN BANGLADESH

**An urgent call to
action**

Plastic has become a part of our life. Wherever we go there is plastic. This Plastic came into the scenario in the 1950s. Since then, its production went skyrocketing reaching 460 million tons in 2019, with projections to hit 590 million tons by 2030.

As plastic production soared, so did plastic waste, almost doubling from 156 million tons in 2000 to a staggering 342 million tons in 2019.

Shockingly, only 9 percent of plastic gets recycled worldwide!

PLASTIC POLLUTION IN BANGLADESH

Plastic pollution is becoming a big issue in Bangladesh, especially in cities like Dhaka and Chittagong. Even though municipal governments are supposed to manage waste, much of it is collected by informal workers. These workers also try to recycle plastic, but there's not enough data to understand the full extent of the problem. Despite producing less plastic waste than China or India, Bangladesh struggles with recycling. COVID-19 worsened the situation by increasing the use of single-use plastic. In Dhaka alone, 10% of daily waste is plastic, with less than half getting recycled. High-income households contribute more to plastic waste than lower-income ones.

IMPACTS OF PLASTIC POLLUTION

Plastic is everywhere in Bangladesh, but people don't realize how bad it can be for our health, the environment, and the economy. When we throw plastic away, we often don't think about the problems it causes. Burning plastic, for example, makes the air dirty and can make people sick. It's also a big problem in the water, especially in places like Cox's Bazar, where tourists leave a lot of plastic trash on the beaches. This trash ends up in the ocean and harms marine life. Even tiny pieces of plastic, called microplastics, can hurt animals and people when they eat them.

Plastic also contains chemicals that can be dangerous to us. When plastic gets hot, these chemicals can leak out and make us sick. Burning plastic trash releases even more harmful stuff into the air. All these problems also cost a lot of money. Every year, billions of dollars are lost because of plastic pollution, including money from tourism and fishing.

PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM IN BANGLADESH

In Bangladesh, the informal sector is crucial for plastic recycling, with over 1 million informal waste collectors working tirelessly to keep the streets clean. While the city corporation also collects waste, the informal sector handles most plastic recycling. They collect mixed waste from households and streets, segregating plastic for sale to small recycling shops. Sometimes, door-to-door collectors take waste directly to secondary collection points, where city corporation representatives transport it to landfills. Informal collectors then retrieve valuable plastics from landfills or collection points, selling them to local recycling shops. These plastics are later turned into pellets for manufacturing new plastic products.

RIVERS AS A MEDIUM BEHIND PLASTIC POLLUTION

Rivers as a medium of plastic pollution

Plastic pollution in Bangladesh is largely fueled by rivers carrying trash from inland areas to the coast and then into the ocean. Each year, about 1 million tons of plastic waste end up in coastal areas, with Karnaphuli and Rupsha rivers contributing the most. Since many rivers flow through multiple countries, Bangladesh also gets plastic waste from its neighbors, especially since India recently banned single-use plastics.

Plastic industries

Bangladesh's plastic industry has boomed, with around 5,000 manufacturers employing 1.2 million people. This growth is reflected in increased plastic consumption, rising from 3 kg per capita in 2005 to 9 kg in 2020, particularly concentrated around Dhaka city. This big increase in plastic production is making the waste problem worse, especially with single-use plastics like bags and bottles.

3 kg per capita in 2005 to 9 kg in 2020, particularly concentrated around Dhaka city.





Unfortunately, much of this plastic isn't disposed of properly and ends up polluting landfills and rivers.

87,000 tons
of single-use plastics are
thrown away each year.



Excessive consumption and indiscriminate disposal of single-use plastics

Single-use plastics, like bags, wrappers, cups, and utensils, are widely used in Bangladesh and around the world. In Bangladesh alone, about 87,000 tons of single-use plastics are thrown away each year, mostly from consumer items like food wrappers and water bottles. Unfortunately, much of this plastic isn't disposed of properly and ends up polluting landfills and rivers. Industries like packaging, airlines, hotels, and restaurants are major contributors to this waste. Overall, single-use plastics are a significant source of pollution in Bangladesh.

The surge in the use of single-use plastics driven by covid-19

Plastic pollution in urban areas of Bangladesh has worsened, especially during COVID-19. The informal sector, responsible for waste collection, was disrupted by the pandemic, leading to more plastic waste. People relied more on single-use plastics like masks and gloves for safety, despite a ban on plastic bags since 2002. In just one year, nearly 2 billion polythene bags were used, producing over 78,000 tons of waste. During the pandemic, plastic gloves, masks, and sanitizer bottles became major contributors to pollution, with millions of items discarded monthly in urban areas.

Inadequate waste management

The lack of awareness and household-level action in Bangladesh contributes to a significant amount of plastic waste. Unlike sorting at the source, households mix all their waste, contaminating recyclable plastics. Higher-income households are the main offenders. Despite producing 323 tons of plastic waste daily, only 174 tons reach landfills. Only a fraction of plastic waste is recycled.

POLICIES IN BANGLADESH

In Bangladesh, regulations concerning plastic products mainly target consumption, aiming to reduce plastic usage and improve waste management.

- The Environment Act of 1995 banned plastic shopping bags, though enforcement was lacking until a 2020 High Court order reinforced the ban.
- The Mandatory Jute Packaging Act of 2010 promoted jute over plastic, expanding to cover more products later.
- The National 3R Strategy for Waste Management (2010) focused on reducing, reusing, and recycling, but enforcement and infrastructure challenges hindered progress.
- Initiatives like the Plastic Park Project (2015) aimed to relocate plastic factories for environmental benefits. The Clean Dhaka Master Plan (2018–2032) emphasized waste management for urban growth.
- The "National Plastic Industry Development Policy 2021 (Draft)" proposed zero waste by 2030 and quality recycling standards.
- Solid Waste Management Regulations (2021) stressed the 3R approach and encouraged Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

CALL TO ACTION

- Connect local recycling facilities with companies utilizing recycled plastic.
- Implement nationwide projects incentivizing plastic waste collection.
- Invest in advanced recycling technologies for diverse plastic types.
- Enforce segregation of plastic waste by businesses to facilitate recycling.
- Collaborate with businesses to establish a market for recycled plastic.
- Regulate plastic imports to encourage reliance on recycled materials.
- Explore plastic-to-fuel conversion methods to reduce waste.
- Establish return machines for monetary incentives, mirroring Denmark's model.
- Advocate for eco-friendly product designs and educate the public on proper plastic waste management.
- Integrate plastic waste awareness into school curriculums to foster sustainable habits from an early age.

All the information was taken from – Plastic Pollution in Bangladesh Drivers, Impacts and Solutions by CPD – <https://cpd.org.bd/resources/2023/04/Plastic-Pollution-in-Bangladesh-Drivers-Impacts-and-Solutions.pdf>



About Practical Action

We are an international development organisation putting ingenious ideas to work so people in poverty can change their world.

We help people find solutions to some of the world's toughest problems. Challenges made worse by catastrophic climate change and persistent gender inequality.

We believe in the power of small to change the big picture. And that together we can take practical action to build futures free from poverty.

Big change starts small.

Bangladesh Country Office:
H-28/A, Road 5, Dhanmondi, Dhaka-1205
Email: practicalaction@practicalaction.org.bd

practicalaction.org

© Practical Action, June 2024

