**Forum: United Nations Development Program (UNDP)**

**Issue #1:** Measures to address waste exportation from developed countries to developing countries

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**Introduction**

As the world slowly approaches 2050, projections indicate that global municipal solid waste generation will exceed 3.4 billion metric tons, marking a staggering increase of over 68% from today's figure of 2.02 billion metric tons. This data underscores the growing problem of waste exportation from developed countries to developing nations. The exportation of waste poses significant environmental, economic, and social challenges to recipient countries. It is therefore essential to take urgent action to address this critical issue.

There are a myriad of different factors that have, and are prompting waste generation to grow by the year, some including population growth, urbanization, and changes in consumer behavior. As populations grow and become more urbanized, the amount of waste generated tends to increase. Additionally, changes in consumer behavior, such as increased consumption of single-use plastics and electronics also contribute to the rise in waste production. Moreover, the globalization of trade and the growth of the global economy have led to increased production and consumption, which in turn generate more waste. Industrial and technological advancements have also contributed to an increase in waste production as many products are now designed to have shorter lifespans, leading to increased consumption and disposal. Overall, a combination of these factors has led to a significant increase in waste production globally.

As a result, waste exportation from developed countries to developing countries has become a pervasive and complex issue with serious environmental, social, and economic consequences. The practice of waste exportation not only poses serious threats to human health and the environment but also poses disproportionate consequences on vulnerable and marginalized communities who often lack the resources and political power to advocate for their rights.

Waste exportation can lead to soil, air, and water pollution, contamination of food sources, and adverse effects on ecosystems, exacerbating the impact of climate change. Although developing countries often would prefer to oppose this practice, it is financially beneficial to local economies and communities. In terms of developing countries, this option is favorable as it is typically cheaper to export waste rather than develop local recycling infrastructures

As a result of the adverse effects that waste exportation can have on nations around the world, nations must address this issue to better the situation and agree on an effective solution.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Hazardous waste:** Unwanted material that contains substances or properties which could be harmful to human health or the environment

**Consumerism:** the theory that the spending of individuals on consumer goods (consumer spending) is the primary source of economic growth and success in a capitalist economy

**Developed Country:** a country with a mature and industrialized economy, a high income, and a high quality of life.

**Developing Country:** a country with a lesser industrial base, a lower quality of life, and a low Gross domestic product (GDP).

**Pollution:** the process of making the environment (air, water, soil, etc.) dirty

**Climate Change:** long-term shifts in temperatures or weather patterns which may or may not be natural

**Neoliberal:** supporting policies with a lot of freedom for markets without much government control of spending and low taxes.

**Toxic:** being poisonous

**General Overview**

The global waste trade has a significant impact on human health and environmental issues. However, every year thousands of shipments of waste are delivered from developed countries to developing countries. This is because it is usually cheaper to export waste than to develop infrastructure to deal with the waste and dispose of it in a safe and environmentally sound manner. But the waste is usually not tracked after it is exported, and rather the developing countries become junk yards for hazardous waste. The responsibility of countries to deal with toxic waste in a safe manner is extremely important for the future of the planet.

**Toxic colonialism**

Toxic colonialism refers to the export of toxic waste to third world countries from the west. The effects of toxic colonialism are largely felt and acknowledged in underprivileged communities which don’t have the education, resources, or knowledge to oppose the practice. This makes it easier for more developed countries or industries to target them, as they know there will be little resistance. As the awareness of toxic colonialism rises, many toxic waste accidents in these communities are being linked to it, particularly in Africa, which has perhaps received the greatest attention. An example of this is the 2015 contamination of the River of Souls.

**Human health effects**

Hazardous waste can have damaging, even at times fatal, effects on human health. This is prominent, especially in long-term exposure to hazardous waste sites. Researchers have found that households within 5 kilometers of toxic waste sites are associated with asthma, tuberculosis, diabetes, and depression. Additionally, more studies have found that exposure to hazardous waste can result in behavioral abnormalities, cancer, genetic mutations, physiological malfunctions, physical deformations, and birth defects.

**Environmental effects**

The environmental effects of exposure to hazardous waste are extremely devastating. Organisms in bodies of water can be killed, killing plants and animals in certain contaminated areas, and creating mutations and defects in animals. Ecosystems existing in contaminated areas are limited in their ability to survive. Additionally, poor waste management can lead to air pollution and can contribute to climate change. Hazardous waste also releases methane, a greenhouse gas that directly contributes to climate change. This is prominent when hazardous waste is in landfills. Methane emissions contaminate the soil and water of that area. The transportation and treatment process of hazardous waste also releases the powerful greenhouse gas carbon dioxide along with other air pollutants, including particulate matter, into the atmosphere.

**Causes of hazardous waste trade**

Developed countries have a higher level of consumerism because of the higher average income so people are more likely to buy things they want in excess instead of what they need. Many items are then replaced prematurely, or are just thrown out. This leads to a higher amount of items ending up in landfills. The goal of a company is to sell as many items as possible, but as consumers are using disposable income on what they buy, the more expensive an item, the less likely they are to buy it. So, they often design products to break down after a certain amount of time, so while an item may appear cheaper, the consumer will have to keep buying it over and over, leading to a larger amount of waste. Additionally, companies create products that are “one-time use” that are often made of disposable materials like plastic. An example of this is plastic water bottles. Plastic water bottles are a common example of hazardous waste. Few companies recycle materials, as it is more expensive. As a result, this waste ends up in landfills and ultimately exported abroad. Additionally, it is much cheaper to export waste rather than invest in infrastructure across the country dealing with waste.

The amount of waste produced by a country often depends on their degree of industrialization. Countries with a higher degree usually are developed countries and therefore produce more waste, while countries with lower degrees are usually developing countries and often are on the receiving end of the waste. Developing countries are also easier targets for waste exportation from developed countries as much of the public does not know either the risks of hazardous waste or that they are being targeted at all due to lack of communication from the government.

**Major Parties Involved and Their Views**

Governments of specific developed and developing nations must adopt policies and regulations to minimize waste production and prioritize domestic waste management. Major stakeholders concerning this issue include the following:

**The United States:** One of the largest global waste producers, the United States generates approximately 239 million tons of municipal solid waste each year. A considerable amount of this waste is exported to developing countries, including China and India, where it poses significant environmental and health hazards for local communities.

**The United Kingdom:** Despite notable progress in recycling and waste management, the United Kingdom generates over 221 million tons of waste each year, with a significant portion exported to developing nations.

**Germany:** Known for its highly strict and bureaucratic waste management policies and high recycling rates, Germany still exports a significant amount of waste to developing nations in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and the Philippines.

**China:** Although considered a developing country, China has historically been a significant destination for waste exports, mainly plastic waste. However, the country recently enacted strict regulations on waste imports, prohibiting some types of waste and placing restrictions on others.

**India:** Also a developing country, India has historically received substantial amounts of waste exports. However, the country has recently implemented measures to limit waste imports, banning certain types of plastic waste and implementing stricter regulations on others.

International organizations should also play an active role in promoting sustainable waste management practices and provide technical and financial assistance to developing nations to improve their waste management capabilities. Waste management companies should invest in sustainable waste treatment and disposal technologies and actively seek partnerships with local communities to develop efficient waste management systems.

Numerous organizations across continents have emerged with a common goal—to advance sustainable waste management efforts around our planet. These initiatives include such notable names as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Bank, the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), along with grassroots movements like that of ISWA or UNDP. Developing countries benefit from these advocacy groups' financial and skill-based assistance as it enables them to cultivate improved infrastructure for managing solid wastes whilst promoting eco-friendly solutions.

**Timeline of Events**

| Date: 1989 | In reaction to instances of hazardous waste dumping in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, the Basel Convention is established to regulate the international trafficking of waste. |
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| Date: 1992 | Western countries start shipping plastic garbage to China and other developing Asian countries for recycling. |
| Date: 2016 | China imported 10,225 million tonnes of plastic waste in 2016. |
| Date: July 2017 | China announces that it will begin banning the import of nearly all plastic garbage, unsorted waste paper, and waste textiles in December 2017. Materials must now have a contamination rate of 0.5% or less to be accepted. |
| Date: March 2018 | Exports of Australian plastic waste to China shrink to one-third of its July 2017 levels |
| Date: April 2018 | Australia’s environment ministers agree on a target of 100% of Australia’s packaging being recyclable, compostable or reusable by 2025 |
| Date: May 2018 | Major ports in Vietnam ban scrap plastic imports until further notice |
| Date: June 2018 | The Thai government issues an order to temporarily prohibit imports of electronic and plastic waste |
| Date: July 2018 | The Malaysian government revokes the import permits for plastic waste and stops issuing scrap plastic import permits for three months |
| Date: October 2018 | The Thai government announces a ban on foreign plastic waste imports by 2021 |
| Date: October 2018 | The Thai government announces a ban on foreign plastic waste imports by 2021 |
| Date October 2018 | Taiwan starts restricting imports of plastic waste – only plastic waste of a single source or type is allowed |
| Date: December 2018 | Indonesian imports of Australian plastic waste reach 52,000 tonnes, a 250% increase from 2014 |
| Date: March 2019 | India announces a complete ban on the import of plastic scrap effective from September 2019 |
| Date: May 2019 | 187 countries (not including the US) sign a treaty at the United Nations Basel Convention to regulate international trade in plastic waste and restrict shipments of plastic waste to poor countries |
| Date: May 2019 | Malaysia’s environment minister announces the country will be sending 3000 tonnes of contaminated plastic waste back to their countries of origin, including Australia, Canada, the UK and the US |
| Date: May 2019 | The Philippines sends 69 shipping containers of plastic waste back to Canada |
| Date: August 2019 | Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting agrees to work on a timeline to ban all export of domestic waste |
| Date: November 2019 | Australia’s federal and state environment ministers release the export ban timeline. The export of waste glass from Australia will be banned by July 2020. Mixed plastics will be banned by July 2021; whole tyres by December 2021; and paper, cardboard and other materials no later than 30 June 2022. |
| Date: 2020 | In March 2020, the Australian, state and territory governments, and the Australian Local Government Association, as members of the former Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed that the export of waste glass, plastic (including processed engineered fuel), tyres and paper be regulated by the Australian government. |

**UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events**

* The Basel convention was adopted on March 22, 1989 in Basel, Switzerland to protect human health from the effects of hazardous waste.. It was put into force in 1992. The Basel Convention was the response to public awareness and opposition to deposits of toxic waste in developing countries from abroad. Overall, the convention established an agreement revolving around the reduction of hazardous waste, the safe and environmentally sound handling of the waste, a prior informed consent regime for the export of these materials, and the prohibition of non-consensual transboundary movements of waste. Since 1992, amendments have been made. In 2019, the convention adopted amendments to Annexes II, VIII, and IX, dealing with the issue of plastic waste. These amendments established the scope of plastic waste that is considered hazardous and subject to PIC procedure, clarifies the plastic waste not considered hazardous, and a new entry which covers plastic waste in general. Additionally, the amendments stated that the conventions trade restrictions forbid member parties from trading scrap or covered waste material with PIC to non-party states, except if they are in an agreement or arrangement provided by Article 11 of the convention.
* In 2020, UN Habitat launched a program called “Waste Wise Cities”. This program was created to minimize the amount of waste dumped on streets, in drains, next to communities, or openly burnt. This program directly helps cities tackle this issue through a 12-step program while also regarding waste as a resource. They do this through integrating a sustainable solid waste management system in the city, which creates opportunities such as renewable energy, green jobs, and becoming more self-sufficient.

**Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue**

In the realm of climate change, the issue has long been a troubling one, interwoven within the very nature of our globalized society.

Once a fledgling concern in the late 1960s and early 1970s, waste exportation burgeoned as industrialized nations sought low-cost disposal alternatives. Developing countries, lured by economic incentives, fell for this influx of waste. Consequently, the UN took the first steps to confront this issue during the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment.

Fast forward to 1989, and we find the international community adopting the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal. This seminal agreement marked a watershed moment, establishing a framework for environmentally sound waste management and disposal. Its impact reverberates to this day.

The Ban Amendment, adopted in 1995, took matters a step further. Prohibiting the export of hazardous waste from the European Union, OECD countries, and Liechtenstein to non-OECD nations, the amendment bolstered efforts to regulate waste trade. Alas, challenges persisted.

To assist developing nations and countries in transition with better waste management and disposal of dangerous wastes, the Basel Convention established the Partnership Program back in 1998. In addition to this initiative's progressive outcome, a remarkable achievement was accomplished in 2006 with the unveiling of Mobile Phone Partnership Initiative (MPPI), which aimed to create sustainable procedures for discarding end-of-life mobile phones through collaboration among NGOs, mobile phone manufacturers, and governments.

Moreover, UNEP's Global Partnership on Waste Management (GPWM) came into effect seven years later. Waste management continues to present challenges for the international community despite significant achievements through this multi-stakeholder forum.

Through facilitating global cooperation, enhancing capacity building efforts and fostering knowledge exchange of best practices in waste management until now may some success be noticed however issues surrounding waste exportation remain multifaceted making sustainability difficult to achieve through NGOs have contributed greatly with valuable frameworks and lessons. Moving forward on this issue will take even greater commitment from the world community as we strive to create effective solutions beneficial to all parties.

**Possible Solutions**

There are a number of ways that this issue can be dealt with. Delegates must consider implementing strict policies into their resolutions to prevent the exportation of toxic waste to developing countries. Additionally, delegates would need to implement penalties for any violations of these policies. It is also important to increase the level of public awareness for this issue, especially in developing countries where there is little to none. As lack of awareness is one of the main contributing factors to the continuation of toxic waste exportation, it is imperative that delegates discuss ways to provide information about the risks and dangers of toxic waste. Additionally, countries investing in infrastructure to deal with waste management will reduce the need to export waste in other countries. Finally, delegates will need to encourage and take into account international cooperation, as it will raise the issue to be of a global nature.

**Sustainable Development Goal Link (SDG)**

Exporting waste from developed countries to underdeveloped nations has become an emerging concern that hinders progress towards United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3, aimed at Good Health and Well-being. Inadequacies in hazardous waste management have led to the adoption of unsustainable practices such as open burning and indiscriminate landfilling that contribute significantly to air pollution. Moreover, these practices pollute water sources and create favorable breeding sites for vectors that carry serious diseases. The global community can achieve SDG 3 by prioritizing efficient solid waste management methods while balancing control measures on exporting wastes. To mitigate the risks posed to public health and advance better living standards for residents in under-developed areas, nothing is more pivotal than putting into practice these measures.

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**Appendix**

1. “THE WORLD'S BIGGEST E-WASTE SITE - Agbogbloshie, Ghana” *Youtube*
   1. <https://youtu.be/aDjDGrrDD7o>
   2. A video about a city in Ghana which has the biggest E-waste dump in Africa. It gives insight into a country affected by toxic waste dumps, from a first-hand perspective.
2. “Basel Convention on Hazardous Wastes - United States Department of State.” *Department of State*
   1. <https://www.state.gov/key-topics-office-of-environmental-quality-and-transboundary-issues/basel-convention-on-hazardous-wastes/>
   2. This website provides a quick and simple overview of the Basel Convention and what it established. It focuses and goes into depth on the plastic waste amendments, which are a form of toxic waste.
3. Basel Convention Main Site
   1. <http://www.basel.int/>
   2. This is the website of the Basel Convention. It provides the exact Convention put into place, guidelines on toxic waste transportation, and current developments.
4. “Health and Ecological Hazards Caused by Hazardous Substances | US EPA.” Environmental Protection Agency
   1. <https://www.epa.gov/emergency-response/health-and-ecological-hazards-caused-hazardous-substances>
   2. This article explains the way that toxic waste harms human and environmental health. It goes into specific examples and why toxic waste affects the community.
5. “Export Waste: How it Exacerbates Global Inequalities and is Counterintuitive to the Fight for Climate Action.” Voices of Youth
   1. <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/export-waste-how-it-exacerbates-global-inequalities-and-counterintuitive-fight-climate-action>
   2. This is an opinion piece that persuades why toxic waste exportation should be banned. It also thoroughly explains the global waste trade in a simple way, like why developed countries export waste, why developing countries fail to properly take care of it, and outlines the attempts by countries to control it.