

## Single-Use Plastics in India

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### Abstract

The use of plastics has become a common norm across the world. Plastics are used in packaging and storing items, manufacturing of electronic materials such as mobile phones and so on. The issue of plastics, however, is not only about the use, but the one-time usage of plastics items, such as polystyrene shopping bags, straws, trays, cutlery, and many more, which are meant to be used once then disposed of. This article focuses on how these plastics are affecting India, how relevant policies should be implemented and whether there should be an alternative to the use of these single-use plastics. Secondary research was conducted for this article, largely by referencing renowned publications. Several works highlight that single-use plastic is one of the major causes of pollution in the country, and both policy makers and citizens who collectively bear the consequences of pollution find it difficult to address the issue. However, to deal with this confliction, alternative methods of dealing with the menace is provided in this article. Implementing and enforcing of laws and recycling alone will not solve the problem but providing alternate resources that are sustainable and ensuring the appropriate use, in addition to the law enforcement, could be a better solution.

### Introduction

Single-use plastics, also known as disposable plastics, are items intended to be used only once before they are thrown away or recycled. These types of plastics include items such as plastic bags, straws, cutlery, and beverage cups. Single-use plastics have become a major environmental concern across the world due to their widespread use and reckless disposal.

## **Problems With Single-Use Plastics**

In the case of India, one of the biggest issues with single-use plastics is the lack of or inadequacy of proper disposal and management of the materials. Many plastic items end up in landfills or as litter in the streets, rivers, and other public spaces. This not only creates unsightly and unhygienic condition, but also harms wildlife and marine life that may ingest or become entangled in the plastics. Some studies prove that some of these plastics become microplastics, which are then transferred to humans through the food chain. In addition to the harm caused by single-use plastics, there are also economic costs associated with their use. According to a study conducted by the Federation of India Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Accenture in 2020, India is expected to lose over \$133 billion of plastic material value by 2030 due to the unsustainable packaging, of which almost 75% or \$100 billion, can be retrieved.

“Single-use plastics are made to be thrown away immediately after use. Contrary to what we may think, they’re often difficult to recycle. They are an absolute disaster for the environment and seriously endanger the climate and our health” (Vanaerschot and Plasier 2021). Recycling alone is not the solution to the plastics waste challenge. In fact, recycled single-use plastics only make up to less than 10% of the total plastics recycled (Vanaerschot & Plaisier, 2021). Increased recycling could only be beneficial if manufacturing and usage of plastics is significantly reduced simultaneously.

## **Possible Solutions**

To address the problem of single-use plastics in India, a number of initiatives have been implemented at the national and state levels. In 2022, the Indian government declared a ban on the manufacture, sale, and use of identified single-use plastic items such as plates, cups, straws, trays, and polystyrene (Dass, 2019). Furthermore, state-level bans and restrictions have been implemented by several local governments. For example, Tamil Nadu has banned the use of plastics bags, plates, and cups while the state of Maharashtra has banned the use of plastics straws. Several cities have also implemented their own plastics bans, including Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. That said, there is a need

for more strict regulations and better enforcement to ensure that these bans are effective and efficient. There is also a need for more education and awareness campaigns to educate the public about the harms caused by single-use plastics and the importance of proper disposal and recycling.

But what alternatives do people or consumers have? A 2019 report published by a national daily showed that there was an enforced ban on fourteen categories of single-use plastic items in Tamil Nadu. Though there was a complete ban on single-use plastics in the state, about nine out of the fourteen banned items shortly returned to the streets again. This can be attributed to the fact that less or no alternatives were provided to the people. Hence, enforcement alone does not solve the problem. To make this effective, alternatives, such as the use of plantains leaves, aluminium foil, paper rolls, lotus leaves, glass/metal cups, bamboo/wooden eateries, and paper straws could be made readily available in the market.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Single-use plastics have become a major problem in India and across the world due to the widespread use and lack of proper disposal. The environmental and economic costs of plastics pollution are significant and urgent action is needed to address these challenges. It is therefore important to implement and enforce stricter regulations on single-use plastics, along with a need for increased public awareness and education. We must all strive to reduce our use of single-use plastics and find more sustainable alternatives to create a cleaner and healthier future, because each ecological footprint counts, not matter how little it is.

## **References**

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