

Importance and Challenges involved in Global Waste Trade

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Commentary

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DESCRIPTION

The global waste trade is the international trade of waste between countries for further treatment, disposal, or recycling. Toxic or hazardous wastes are often imported by developing countries from developed countries. A Global Review of Solid Waste Management describes the amount of solid waste produced in a given country. Specifically, countries which produce more solid waste are more economically developed and more industrialized. The report explains that "Generally, the higher the economic development and rate of urbanization, the greater the amount of solid waste produced." Therefore, countries in the Global North, which are more economically developed and urbanized, produce more solid waste than Global South countries. Current international trade flows of waste follow a pattern of waste being produced in the Global North and being exported to and disposed of in the Global South. Multiple factors affect which countries produce waste and at what magnitude, including geographic location, degree of industrialization, and level of integration into the global economy.

Numerous scholars and researchers have linked the sharp increase in waste trading and the negative impacts of waste trading to the prevalence of neoliberal economic policy. With the major economic transition towards neoliberal economic policy in the 1980s, the shift towards "free-market" policy has facilitated the sharp increase in the global waste trade. Henry Giroux, Chair of Cultural Studies at McMaster University, gives his definition of neoliberal economic policy. As a policy and political project, neoliberalism is wedded to the privatization of public services, selling off of state functions, deregulation of finance and labor, elimination of the welfare state and unions, liberalization of trade in goods and capital investment, and the marketization and commodification of society." Given this economic platform of privatization, neoliberalism is based on expanding free-trade agreements and establishing open-borders to international trade markets. Trade liberalization, a neoliberal economic policy in which trade is completely deregulated, leaving no tariffs, quotas, or other restrictions on international trade is designed to further developing countries' economies and integrate them into the global economy. Critics claim that

although free-market trade liberalization was designed to allow any country the opportunity to reach economic success, the consequences of these policies have been devastating for Global South countries, essentially crippling their economies in a servitude to the Global North. Even supporters such as the International Monetary Fund, “progress of integration has been uneven in recent decades” Specifically, developing countries have been targeted by trade liberalization policies to import waste as a means of economic expansion. The guiding neoliberal economic policy argues that the way to be integrated into the global economy is to participate in trade liberalization and exchange in international trade markets. Their claim is that smaller countries, with fewer infrastructures, less wealth, and less manufacturing ability, should take in hazardous wastes as a way to increase profits and stimulate their economies.

Challenges in developing countries

Areas with developing economies often experience exhausted waste collection services and inadequately managed and uncontrolled dumpsites. The problems are worsening. Problems with governance complicate the situation. Waste management in these countries and cities is an ongoing challenge due to weak institutions, chronic under-resourcing and rapid urbanization. All of these challenges, along with the lack of understanding of different factors that contribute to the hierarchy of waste management, affect the treatment of waste. In developing countries, waste management activities are usually carried by poor, for their survival. It has been estimated that 2% of population in Asia, Latin America and Africa are dependent on waste for their livelihood. Family organized, or individual manual scavengers are often involved with waste management practices with very little supportive network and facilities with increased risk of health effects. Additionally, this practice prevents their children from further education. Participation level of most citizens in waste management is very low; residents in urban areas are not actively involved in the process of waste management.