BRAND AUDIT 2019- SRI LANKA
BREAKING THE PLASTIC CYCLE IN ASIA

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Centre for Environmental Justice

Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ) is a national level environmental organization working for the promotion of Environmental Good Governance and Environmental Justice established in 2004. CEJ is instrumental in several national level environmental litigations. We promote environmental awareness and promotes citizens science. CEJ is a member of #breakfreefromplastic movement. CEJ is also a member of the Friends of the Earth International (FOEI), which is the world largest Grassroots environmental network and several other global environmental networks.

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About this Publication

This publication is the result of the brand audits conducted in Sri Lanka under the Friends of the Earth International and Ishvara Foundation supported “Breaking the Plastic cycle in Asia” project in the asian region.

Under this activity CEJ also managed to develop five case studies on plastic related laws in Bangladesh, Malaysia, Nepal, Australia and Sri Lanka. Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, Sahabath Alam Malaysia, Friends of the Earth Australia and Pro-Public, Nepal partnered with the CEJ in this project. The legal case studies and the model law will be published separately.
The word Plastic is derived from two Greek words 'plastikos' and 'plastos', which means 'fit for moulding' and 'moulded'. Plastic is made by polymerization of various monomers that can be derived during the oil refinery process. They are human-made synthetic materials, which are long molecules built around chains of carbon atoms typically with hydrogen, oxygen, sulfur, and nitrogen filling in the spaces. Some common plastics include Polypropylene, Polyethylene, Poly methyl methacrylate, Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET), vinyl, Poly Vinyl Chloride (PVC), and polycarbonates like bisphenol A (BPA) etc.

Plastics are soft and easy to mold into many different forms during the manufacturing process. Some plastics are thermosets and some are thermoplastics. Thermosetting plastics generally cannot be melted and reshape and therefore are not recyclable. Both plastics are long lasting and therefore, they don’t degrade or don’t break those long chains into monomers or carbon hydrogen and oxygen. Plastics longevity and inefficient degradation are reasons why plastics have become a major issue since the invention of 'bakelite', the first plastic in 1907.
Plastic has many uses and benefits. These plastics are used in packaging, engineering, for medical purposes and many other occasions. Its cheap and grossly available as long as petrochemical industry runs.

There are variants made from renewable materials such as polylactic acid from corn or cellulosic from cotton linters.

In developed economies, about a 30% of plastic is used in packaging and about 30% in building applications such as piping, plumbing, or vinyl boards. Other uses include automobiles, furniture, and toys etc. Plastics have many uses in the medical field as well, with the introduction of polymer implants and other medical devices derived at least partially from plastic.

However, because of it’s wide usage and increased production it has also become a global menace and pollute ecosystems, oceans, and even our own body.

This slow decomposition after being discarded as trash is due to the composition of large molecules. Decomposing Bacteria and other microorganisms cannot break these synthetic material in natural conditions.

Although recycling was introduced to resolve this issue only 15-20% of plastics goes through the recycling globally.
Although a lot of attention has been given to single use plastics, other more durable plastics are also part of the global plastic crisis. The plastics used in the building and automobile industry simply have a longer lifespan. The plastic problem is thus not just about single use plastic. Plastic beads, Mirco plastics, and nano plastics are also of major concern.

Sri Lanka generates at least 7500 tones of waste per day. However, local authorities collect only 3500 tones a day. Almost half is dumped in the marshy lands and it accumulates in waterways. Single use plastics such as plastic bags, lunch sheets, wrappers, straws, polystyrene boxes, cups, cutleries made almost 15 percent of the urban waste.

Surveys indicates that Sri Lankans throw away 45 million yogurt cups a month and dump 15 million plastic lunch sheets and 20 million plastic shopping bags a day.

Almost zero percent of shopping bags and lunch sheets, sachet packets go to the recycling. Limited amount of plastic bottles, yoghurt cups collect back and use for recycling. Its impossible to collect such single use plastics from the waste dumps. The recyclers have no capacity to collect them and the government of Sri Lanka has no regulations for mandatory segregation of waste.

Vivekanantharajah Subramaniyam & team, Thirukkovil, Eastern Province
Single use Plastic?

Maduranga Imbulegoda and team, Kalutara, Western Province

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Plastic Pollution has reached every corner of the earth system. Every day approximately 8 million pieces of plastic pollution find their way into our oceans. There may now be around 5.25 trillion macro and microplastic pieces floating in the open ocean.
Some research suggest Sri Lanka is the 5th nation to mismanage plastic waste in the world among countries such as China, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Some other information shows Sri Lankans annually throw around 0.24 – 0.64 Million Metric Tonnes of plastic waste in to the ocean. Although this is questionable we don't have adequate research and data to prove or dismiss this claim.

The report released by the Auditor Generals Department of Sri Lanka in January 2020 state that approximately 210,000 metric tonnes of plastic and Polythene are added to the environment annually. Sri Lanka had imported 3,353.9 million kilograms of plastic worth Rs.184.3 billion in the seven years from 2012 to 2018, according to the environmental audit report. Compared to 2012, importing plastics had increased by 482.6 million Kilograms in 2018. Of the total quantity of plastics imported in 2018, 64 per cent had been imported as raw materials.

Sri Lanka was once home to the most beautiful beaches in the world, but are now covered in plastics, this is largely due to plastic mismanagement. Most of the pollutants found are single use plastics that are disposed of quickly.

Asia Lanka Social Development Corporation team, Panadura, Western Province
and carelessly. They are either directly thrown into the ocean or end up here through rivers. Sri Lanka being an island means it is also prone to receive floating plastics from surrounding countries with ocean currents. Therefore, during the brand audit, a specific focus was given to waste returned and dumped in the coastal areas surrounding Sri Lanka.

Brand audits are a powerful tool to challenge the corporate narrative that plastic pollution is a waste management issue caused by individual consumer. Sri Lanka was included in the global level brand audit conducted by the #breakfreefromplastic in September 2019. For the second year in a row, CocaCola came in as number one Global single use plastic Polluter, followed by Nestle and Pepsico.

This report is based on self-reported data of 10 brand audits submitted by volunteers around the country. We relied on their local efforts and CEJ conducted two audits with direct supervision. This report cannot claim to be fully representative of all plastic polluters, as there are more brands than are captured in this report.

CEJ take this opportunity to thank everyone who volunteered to make this effort success.

CEJ team, Mattakkuliya, Western Province
12 Plastic Brand Audits
250 Volunteers
CEJ works with a grass root network of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations around the country and they were recruited for the task after confirming their willingness to participate. They were given the freedom to decide the location to conduct the audit i.e. Beach, School, City Market etc. Organizations were advised to define an area (square meters) for the audit. CEJ offered a guideline of 200 - 400 sqm floor space.

All the plastic within the demarcated area was collected and sorted based on the criteria provided. Brands were consequently identified and non-branded plastics were also accounted for. Once the identification process was complete, the trash was handed over to the nearest municipal or recycling center for proper disposal. In total 12 sites were selected for the audit brand.
During the brand audits we have collected 12,823 pieces of plastics. It was found that 5,802 pieces had no brand name. Packaging items topped among the plastics.

The unbranded items found included yoghurt cups, bottles, tooth brushes, yoghurt spoons, bottle caps, disposable cups, shopping bags, lunch sheets, Jelly cups, transparent spice packets, plastic straws, fishing nets, Styrofoam boxes, apple wrappers, lunch boxes, cigarette butts etc.

They were collected from 2 inland sites and 10 coastal sites. Most of these plastics found in the coastal sites are drifted by wave actions. It was found that majority items found are single use plastics come from consumer goods.

Elephant house tops among the brands found during this brand audit. Coca Cola, Cargills, Nestle, and Unilever are the other brands that produces high percentage of single use plastics.
**Results**

**Branded Vs Unbranded plastics**

Unbranded 45%
Branded 55%

**Top 10 Plastic Polluters in Sri Lanka**

1. Coca-Cola: 10%
2. Elephant House: 18%
3. Nestle: 6%
4. Unilever: 6%
5. Cargills: 7%
6. Fonterra: 4%
7. Munchee: 4%
8. American Water: 2%
9. Hemas: 2%
10. Renuka: 2%

Other Brands 39%
Top 20 Single use Plastic polluters in Sri Lanka

Number of items

1. Elephant House - 1259
2. Coca cola - 721
3. Nestle - 461
4. Cargills - 472
5. Unilever - 434
6. Fonterra - 278
7. Munchee - 254
8. American Water - 178
9. Renuka - 126
10. Hemas - 162
11. SMAK - 108
12. Milko - 107
13. Darly Butler - 89
14. Prima - 80
15. Maliban - 70
16. Aqua - 61
17. Diana - 43
18. Uswatta - 41
19. Orzone - 37
Top 15 Plastic polluters in Sri Lanka

Unilever 3%
Nestle 4%
Cargills 4%
CocaCola 6%
Elephant House 10%
Unbranded 46%
Other Brands 16%
American Water 1%
Munchee 2%
Hemas 1%
Darly Butler 1%
SMAK 1%
Renuka 1%
Maliban 1%
Milko 1%
Prima 1%
Single use plastics has become a serious crisis for the earth system. This needs urgent attention. We cannot be satisfied with the global and local actions currently being taken to resolve the issue.

During the audit we found these plastics in the public beaches, school backyards and other public places. They are dumped directly by the people. The single use plastics found in the garbage dumps is a threat to all animals including wildlife such as elephants and other mammals. These plastics in the ocean are threat to fish, turtles, and even coral reefs. They create many social, environmental, visual, economic, and cultural impacts.

Plastic products are thrown away because there is no second hand value for these plastics. Even though some plastics such as bottles can be recycled, there is no successful collection process.

During the brand audit, some limitations were encountered. Firstly, finding a suitable location for the audit was challenging. Often plastics cannot be easily separate from other dirty garbage. It is not hygienic to choose such locations.

Secondly, it is difficult for lay people to identify different types of plastics.

Some of the plastics found are unbranded. Such plastics may include a combination of HDPE, LDPE bags, sheets, and polystyrene boxes. Common items like shopping bags, lunch sheets, home or small enterprise made spice packets do not have brand names either. The third limitation is that it is extremely difficult to pick up small pieces of plastics.

In this audit we found Elephant House is the top single use plastic polluter in Sri Lanka. However the results found vary from location to location. The results shows Coca Cola tops in some locations. CEJ believe this may be because brand popularity is different in various locations.
It is of vital importance to combat and regulate the plastic crisis in order to save ecosystems, living species, and future human generations. The government, businesses, and the general public all have their own role to play in the fight against the single use plastic problem. We make the following recommendations for each party.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

1. Single use plastics such as lunch sheets, shopping bags, small plastic bottles and other selected items have to be totally ban immediately.

2. Large plastic bottles, plastic containers, yoghurt cups and other recyclable items need to be collected and 100 percent recycled.

3. All plastic products need to be included in the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programme and this law need to enact without any delay.

4. Make waste segregation mandatory for all citizens and they should be given to the recyclers only. Government should create incentives for people to take part of mandatory waste segregation.

5. Awareness and education on plastics and waste management should be included to the school/ University curriculum.

6. A national awareness raising campaign should be established and all media should be asked to provide space and time free of charge for educating people on plastics.

7. Adequate recycling facilities should be established and tax concessions and other benefits should be given to those investors.

8. Waste incineration should be discourages as it emits harmful substances to air when burning plastics.

9. National priority should be given to develop alternatives for the current single use plastic items.

10. Culverts, Canals, and small streams should be equipped with plastics traps.

11. Ocean dumping, river dumping, and other haphazard dumping should be declare as a punishable offense.

12. Implement the National Waste Management Policy and Strategy without delay. Current regulations should be strictly enforced and bring other regulations needed.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE BUSINESSES

1. Design all the packaging to avoid generation of single use plastic. Stop using small containers, Sachet packets etc. Provide a clearly visible message to the consumers in the package discouraging littering.

2. Support and implement the Extended Producer Responsibility. Introduce collection, reuse, and recycling mechanisms.

3. Introduce refilling, bulk packaging and other distribution methods to reduce the usage of packaging material.

4. Find environmental friendly alternatives and compostable packaging material and support relevant research.

5. Do not delay moving to sustainable packaging and other packaging reduction strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE PUBLIC

1. Be aware of the waste that you produce. Avoid using single use plastic items as much as possible. These include lunch sheets, plastic straws, yogurt spoons and other unwanted packaging like plastic bags and wrappers etc.

2. Take your own bag and multiple use containers, baskets for shopping.

3. Segregate your waste and give them for recycling. Keep your electronic waste and plastic waste separate from other waste.

4. Do not burn plastic. They releases carcinogenic and toxic fumes that can make you and your children sick.

5. Educate your children, family members and neighbours about the negative impacts of the plastics and burning plastic.
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