

# Recycling: A Solution, But for How Long

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## The Journey of Waste

We grow up hearing slogans, "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle". They are printed on school walls, wrappers, and even garbage bins. Recycling is often portrayed as the ultimate act of climate responsibility. But recently, I asked myself: "Does recycling actually help? And if it does, for how long?"

I came across a video about how countries like Malaysia have become dumping grounds for other nations' recycled waste. It shocked me. These were the items people thought they were "saving the planet" with.

Most of us throw waste into separate bins, hand it to collectors, and feel like we have done our part. But do we ever ask, where does this waste really go? What happens after it leaves our sight?

Are we sending it far enough away to forget?



# Recycling in Real Sense

Recycling is the process of making unwanted things wanted again, giving a new life to use materials by changing their form. It reduces our need to extract raw materials like fossil fuels, minerals and trees. That means less deforestation, less mining, and less pressure on nature. But, recycling itself is not without cost. It does help, but it is not a perfect solution. It is a step, not the end.



# **The Case of Malaysia**

## ***A Global Dumping Ground***

Many developed nations like the U.S, UK export recyclable waste to countries like Malaysia because it is cheaper than processing at home. But a large part of this waste is contaminated or non-recyclable. Malaysia has become overwhelmed with rising health and environmental risks. Since 2019, Malaysia began sending illegal plastic shipments back to their origin countries, refusing to be the world's landfill.

This made me wonder: Are we actually recycling? Or just outsourcing the burden?



# The Problem of Recycling: Downcycling

Even when we recycle properly, there is a hidden issue. The quality of materials drops each time they are reused. Plastic becomes weaker and can only be recycled 2-3 times. Paper fibers shorten after each cycle. Metals can be recycled almost endlessly but require high energy input. This process is known as downcycling: turning a high-quality product into something lower in quality. So, while recycling helps, it is not a permanent solution.



# Path Ahead

We must first know what can be recycled. Recycling starts with awareness. Most of us don't know what can and what can't be recycled. This leads to wishcycling: tossing everything in the bin hoping it helps, but actually makes it worse.

Recycling is important but we must think about what is more sustainable. So, *to be better is to be sustainable*:

1. Reduce - Less consumption. Think before buying.
2. Reuse - Choose glass over plastic. Refill instead of repurchasing.
3. Rethink - Support zero-waste ideas: composting, biodegradable materials.



# The Emissions We Don't See

In Nepal, most of our waste ends up in landfills and that's where things get worse. When organic waste like food and paper rots in landfills, it releases methane, a greenhouse gas 80 times more powerful than carbon dioxide in the short term.

This invisible gas rises from places like Sisdole or Okharpauwa, quietly warming our skies. It's not just the visible trash; it's the silent poison.



# National Measures

Nepal has some strong policies:

- Solid Waste Management Act (2011) - requires segregation of waste at the source.
- Local Government Operation Act (2017) - gives municipalities power to manage waste systems.
- Notice published in Nepal Gazette bans production, import, distribution and use of plastic bags thinner than 40 microns.



But laws alone are not enough. Implementation is weak and public awareness alone is not effective. Everything starts with awareness. Yet, most households still throw everything into one bin. So, real change starts at home.

We can't recycle our way out of this crisis. But we can learn what is recyclable, reduce what we consume, and talk to others about it.

The Earth doesn't need us to be perfect. She just needs us to be present, aware, and honest.

