Mountains of Waste: Human Civilization's Serious Problem & Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Every year, about 55 million tonnes of municipal solid waste (MSW) and 38 billion litres of sewage is generated in the urban areas of India. In addition, large quantities of solid and liquid wastes are generated by industries. Waste generation in India is expected to increase rapidly in the future.

By 2100, India's total waste generation will be 70 per cent of all the high income and OECD countries put together. With India becoming the most populous country in the world before 2030 and its projected economic growth rate, it is likely only a matter of time before India is the world's largest municipal solid waste generator.

A country's total solid waste is a function mainly of the number of middle and above middle class citizens who almost all live in cities. As more people migrate to urban areas and as incomes increase, consumption levels are likely to rise, as are rates of waste generation.

It is estimated that the amount of waste generated in India will increase at a per capita rate of approximately 1-1.33% annually. India will probably surpass the U.S. and then China as the world's single largest solid waste generator.

Garbage generation in South Asia will increase eight-fold by year 2100 to reach two million tonnes a day, bringing the region at par with the conglomerate of the world's 34 most developed countries. In 1900, the world's 220 million urban residents produced less than 300, 000 tonnes of rubbish per day, comprising relatively innocuous "broken household items, ash, food waste and packaging" per day.

In 2000, around 2.9 billion people (47 % of world population) were living in cities. In 2025, the figure will touch 4.74 billion (58 % of world population) . By 2025, garbage production is likely to reach 6 million tonnes a day, a quantity that will be "enough to fill a line of rubbish trucks 5, 000 kilometres long every day". The world's cities together will be producing garbage in excess of 11 million tonnes per day by 2100, which is over three times today's figure.

This has significant impacts on the amount of land that is and will be needed for disposal, economic costs of collecting and transporting waste and the environmental consequences of increased MSW generation levels. We have to find ways and means to fight the rising mountains of the garbage and the other waste.

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