

From Waste Colonialism to Environmental Justice: Lessons from Indonesia's Plastic Pollution Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's plastic pollution crisis reflects global structural inequalities termed waste colonialism, the export of waste from the Global North to developing nations. This study critiques technocratic solutions (e.g., recycling) that overlook socio-political drivers and proposes an environmental justice framework. Through mixed-methods analysis integrating policy reviews, participatory interviews, and spatial mapping, the findings revealed that waste colonialism exacerbates coastal pollution in Java and Bali, driven by imports from the Global North. Effective interventions require community-led circular economy models rooted in local cooperation (gotong royong) and transnational accountability mechanisms to hold waste-exporting nations responsible. This study bridges contamination theory with geopolitical dynamics, highlighting the necessity of policy reforms to curb exploitative waste trade and empower marginalized communities. Environmental governance must prioritize cultural and social equity along with technological fixes to address systemic inequities. These insights underscore the urgency of reimagining global waste regimes through non-justice-centered frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

This article delves into the link between waste colonialism and the act of sending waste from industrialized nations to the Global South and the concept of environmental justice. Although waste colonialism has been studied in various settings, its relationship with environmental justice, particularly in developing countries, remains underexplored. Environmental justice focuses on the unequal impact experienced by marginalized communities due to the disposal of hazardous waste, resource extraction, and land use changes that do not benefit them. These communities, frequently located in the Global South, endure the environmental burden of activities that benefit wealthier countries without gaining from the resources extracted.

Indonesia's battle with plastic pollution underscores the issue of waste colonialism. Developed countries, especially those in Europe, have a long-standing practice of sending waste, including plastics, to less-developed nations. Germany exemplifies this trend by importing millions of tons of waste each year from neighboring countries. On a global level, China is the largest waste importer, having processed billions of tons of plastic, which has influenced global waste trade and impacted countries such as Indonesia. This trade has caused considerable environmental damage in Indonesia, with plastic waste accumulating in rivers, landfills, and along coastlines, exacerbating an already severe pollution issue. According to a study by J. In 2000, Germany, an industrialized nation, was a leading waste importer of approximately 1 million tons of waste, mainly from the Netherlands and Italy. However, China is the world's largest waste importer. In 2004, the country imported more than 4 billion tons of plastic, 12 billion tons of paper, and 10 billion tons of scrap iron and steel.

Schlosberg and Hornborg to explore how these dynamics mirror larger concerns of ecological and environmental justice. Schlosberg emphasizes the significance of equity, recognition, participation, and capabilities in tackling environmental injustices, whereas Hornborg critiques the global systems of unequal exchange that shift environmental burdens to poorer nations. In Indonesia, waste colonialism exemplifies how wealthier countries offload the environmental costs of their consumption to nations that lack resources to manage these burdens. By examining the intersection of waste colonialism and environmental justice, this article offers deeper insight into the global dynamics of plastic pollution and the persistent patterns of exploitation that disproportionately affect developing countries like Indonesia.

Research Problems

This study addressed three interconnected research problems.

1. Neocolonial Exploitation: How does the global plastic waste trade perpetuate the historical patterns of colonialism, disproportionately burdening Indonesia's coastal communities?
2. Policy Ineffectiveness: Why do existing legal frameworks, such as the Basel Convention and the UN Plastic Treaty, fail to curb exploitative waste trade and protect marginalized populations?

3. Community-Centric Solutions: How can Indonesia's gotong royong (mutual cooperation) traditions inform equitable and scalable models for waste governance?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Synthesis: Integrating Technological Solution and Environmental Justice in Waste Management

1. Advantages of Previous works.

The article by Moffett (2024), titled *The Disproportionate Burden on Vulnerable Communities in the Trade of Plastic Waste: How Environmental Justice Should be Integrated into the United Nations Treaty on Plastic Pollution*, provides a critical lens on the disproportionate impacts of the global waste trade on vulnerable communities in the Global South. Moffett highlights how these communities, particularly in regions like Indonesia, face unjust environmental burdens as wealthier nations externalize their plastic waste. The central theme of environmental justice is explored in relation to the UN Plastic Treaty, with an emphasis on the need to integrate justice-oriented frameworks into waste management policies.

Moffett's work offers a valuable perspective by bridging environmental justice and global waste governance, calling for a more inclusive and equitable approach to managing plastic waste. This provides an important counterpoint to the technocratic focus on recycling and circular economy models, as it underscores the need for policies that not only address the environmental aspects of waste management but also consider the social and economic dimensions of the trade.

2. Technocratic Focus on Recycling and the Circular Economy

Many studies, including those by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and analyses of the Basel Convention, emphasize technological solutions for waste management, particularly enhancing recycling infrastructure and promoting circular economy models. These approaches are crucial for reducing waste volumes and improving resource efficiency, offering technical feasibility for waste reduction. Such strategies have significantly influenced corporate sustainability efforts and spurred a global push for environmentally responsible policies within the corporate sector.

However, a key limitation of these studies is their tendency to overlook systemic inequities in the global waste trade. While technological solutions like recycling contribute to waste reduction, they fail to address the root causes of environmental injustice, such as exploitation and unequal trade dynamics. Developed countries often externalize their waste to less-developed nations, creating an unjust burden on those already marginalized. This disparity in global waste management highlights the urgent need for a more equitable approach, one that includes both technological advancements and a focus on environmental justice.

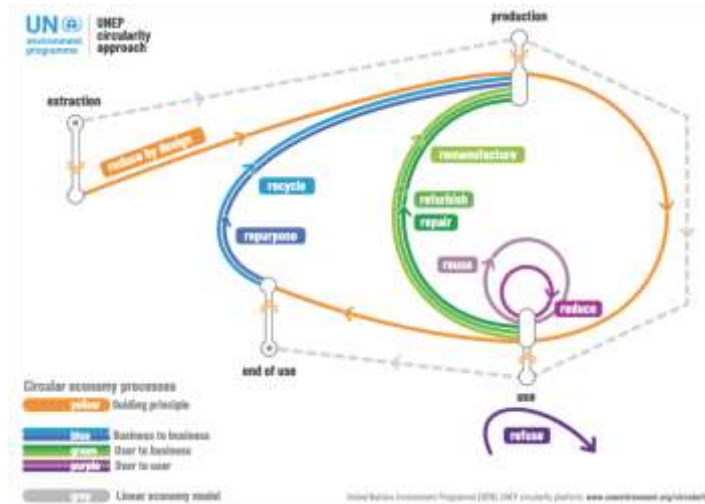


Figure 1. Circular economy model illustrating product life cycle stages and strategies such as reduce, reuse, and recycle.

3. Policy-Centric Critiques of the Basel Convention

The Basel Convention, which governs the international movement of hazardous waste, has been subject to significant critique. Scholars argue that the Convention’s reliance on voluntary compliance and weak enforcement mechanisms have allowed waste-exporting countries to continue dumping toxic waste in developing nations without facing serious consequences. Critics call for more stringent measures, such as binding production caps for plastic and mandatory reporting requirements for waste-exporting nations.

These critiques, as outlined in Moffett’s work and supported by various environmental policy experts, point to a clear need for reform. The call for stricter transboundary waste controls is vital for ensuring that waste trade no longer disproportionately impacts vulnerable communities. Stronger international governance mechanisms could prevent the exploitation of less-developed nations, ensuring a more just and sustainable global waste management system.



Figure 2. Timeline of global policies and initiatives addressing plastic pollution from 1994 to 2020.

4. Synthesis: Technological Solutions and Environmental Justice

While technological solutions to waste management, such as recycling and circular economy models, play a vital role in reducing waste and improving resource efficiency, they must be integrated with frameworks that address environmental justice. Moffett's work emphasizes the importance of environmental justice in the global waste trade, highlighting how vulnerable communities are often left out of the policymaking process and bear the brunt of the environmental damage caused by waste exportation.

Therefore, a balanced approach to waste management should incorporate both technological innovations and justice-oriented policies. This approach would not only address the environmental impacts of waste but also consider the social consequences faced by communities in the Global South. Moving forward, it is crucial that global waste governance systems evolve to integrate these dimensions ensuring that policies not only reduce waste but also create a fairer and more sustainable system for all involved.

5. Schlosberg's Environmental Justice Framework

David Schlosberg's environmental justice framework grounded in the four pillars of equity, recognition, participation, and capabilities offers a valuable lens for assessing the localized impacts of pollution in the Global South, particularly highlighting how communities disproportionately bear environmental harms without benefiting from waste trade, as seen in countries like Indonesia; a key strength of this framework lies in its emphasis on inclusive policymaking, ensuring marginalized voices are represented and heard in the development of environmental policies.

Disadvantages and Research Gaps

1. Overlooking Neocolonial Dynamics

Most existing works avoid framing the global plastic waste trade as waste colonialism, a concept coined to describe how wealthier nations externalize environmental harm to the Global South. This omission overlooks historical parallels to colonial resource extraction and labor exploitation, where the Global South continues to bear the brunt of global ecological burdens.

a. Ethical Framework in Policy Debates

There is limited integration of moral ethics into waste governance discussions. Although the Hamilton, C. (2017). *Defiant earth: The fate of humans in the Anthropocene*. John Wiley & Sons. framework emphasizes a holistic approach to environmental justice, the direct application of such ethical perspectives to global waste policy remains underexplored in his scholarly contributions, Clive Hamilton offers a critical examination of the Anthropocene epoch, characterized by the dominance of human activity as the foremost geological agent, which he attributes to human hubris specifically, the presumption that humanity possesses the capacity to govern and subjugate nature. His discourse holds significant pertinence to Christian theological perspectives regarding sin against creation, a deeply entrenched concept within the Christian doctrinal framework. Hamilton

advocates for a contemplative assessment of the repercussions stemming from human endeavors on the environment, which resonates with biblical doctrines that underscore the imperative to nurture and safeguard the divine creation.

3. Human Hubris vs. Stewardship (Genesis 1:28)

Hamilton posits that humanity has emerged as a "geological agency" responsible for detrimental alterations to Earth's ecological systems, climatic shifts, and the unprecedented proliferation of plastic waste. He elucidates the extent to which human arrogance has transgressed the natural limits, thereby inflicting destruction and modification upon the world as ordained by God. Conversely, Genesis 1:28 enjoins humanity to "have dominion" over the earth, a directive frequently interpreted within the Christian framework as a mandate for stewardship rather than exploitation. This notion of dominion is perceived as an obligation to cherish, cultivate, and defend God's creation. Hamilton critiques the pervasive violation of this principle, wherein humans abandon their role as custodians of the earth in favor of exploitative practices that deplete natural resources with scant consideration for long-term repercussions.

4. Human Inability vs. Divine Authority (Isaiah 45:18)

Hamilton asserts that humanity has exhibited an inability to manage the ramifications of its actions, exemplified by the pervasive accumulation of microplastics within marine environments. The complexity and scale of human-created systems have surpassed our capacity for effective control.

Nevertheless, Isaiah 45:18 affirms that God created the earth "not in vain," but for habitation and stewardship. Humanity is entrusted with the sacred duty of environmental guardianship; however, through arrogance and systemic failures, humans have instead precipitated destruction. Hamilton elucidates how human actions stand in stark contradiction to divine intent, as God's creation was not destined for ruin but rather for appreciation and preservation.

5. Moral Responsibility vs. Structural Sin (Amos 5:24)

Hamilton contends that the environmental crisis—including plastic pollution and climate change arises from unchecked capitalism and consumerism, which have disproportionately shifted environmental burdens onto the Global South. This global economic paradigm exacerbates environmental inequity, with affluent nations exploiting less affluent counterparts that lack the resources or political power to resist.

In Amos 5:24, the biblical text calls for "justice to roll on like a river," highlighting the collective obligation to address injustices and advocate for social equity. The transference of plastic waste to Indonesia can be interpreted as a manifestation of structural sin, whereby wealthy countries exacerbate pollution and environmental degradation, while developing nations like Indonesia endure the brunt of these adverse effects. Hamilton illustrates how this inequitable economic framework contravenes biblical principles of justice.

Integrating Hamilton's Ideas into Christian Ethics

1. Critique of Human Hubris: Plastic Pollution as "Anthropocenic Sin"

Hamilton highlights that problems such as microplastics, ocean pollution, and climate change illustrate humanity's inability to maintain control, leading to systems that harm itself. From a Christian viewpoint, this resembles the concept of sinning against creation, where people fail in their responsibility as caretakers of the earth, as outlined in Genesis 2:15. Failing to protect and care for the Earth is seen as a sin that harms God's creation.

2. Capitalism and Injustice: Waste Colonialism as Structural Sin

Hamilton critiques global capitalism for driving the exploitation of resources and waste, with wealthy countries expanding their environmental impact into developing countries. This can be paralleled with **James 5:1-6**, which condemns the wealthy who live in luxury while exploiting the poor, similar to how waste-exporting nations live comfortably while allowing developing countries such as Indonesia to suffer from pollution.

3. The Need for Systemic Transformation: Integral Ecology and the Anthropocene

Hamilton contends that addressing the environmental crisis necessitates profound transformations in the global economic and political frameworks. This perspective is consistent with the concept of gotong royong (community cooperation), which serves as a local strategy to challenge the inequitable global systems that contribute to environmental degradation.

4. Limited Focus on Community Agencies

Much of the existing literature portrays countries in the Global South as passive victims of waste colonialism. This view underestimates grassroots movements and local agencies already active in combatting waste and environmental pollution, such as Indonesia's gotong royong (community cooperation) efforts.

5. Gaps in Transnational Accountability

There is a lack of analysis concerning legal mechanisms to hold waste-exporting countries accountable for the harm they cause, such as reparations for pollution or liability clauses in global agreements, such as the UN Plastic Treaty. This gap undermines efforts to establish a truly equitable system for waste management and environmental justice.

METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods approach that integrates qualitative research offers a comprehensive framework for addressing complex research problems. By combining case study analysis, literature review, and policy analysis, researchers can develop a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of their subject. A qualitative research method with a combination of case study analysis, literature review, and policy analysis.

Case study analysis involves an in-depth exploration of a specific case, such as a program, policy, or event, within its real-world context. This method draws on diverse sources of evidence, including documents, interviews, and observations, to provide a detailed examination of the case.

The literature review serves to contextualize the research by examining existing theories, studies, and scholarly works. It helps establish a theoretical framework, identify gaps in current knowledge, and situate the research within the broader academic discourse.

Policy analysis focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of existing policies. This process includes assessing their design, implementation, and impact, as well as considering the political and social contexts in which they operate.

RESEARCH RESULT

Waste Colonialism in Indonesia

In the wake of China's 2018 ban on plastic waste imports, Indonesia became the world's top recipient of plastic waste, with 116,000 tons of plastic imported in 2019. The spatial mapping of pollution hotspots in Java (especially the Citarum River) and Bali shows that waste from countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States accumulates in informal landfills, exacerbating Indonesia's pollution crisis. This influx of waste has led to significant health crises (such as respiratory diseases from the open burning of waste) and economic losses (declining fisheries and tourism), disproportionately affecting low-income communities.

Legal and Policy Failures

Although recent amendments to the Basel Convention require prior informed consent (PIC) for waste shipments, illegal shipments persist, often because of weak enforcement and corruption in Indonesia. The country's 2020 plastic import ban has faced challenges owing to lax implementation and limited political will. The draft of the UN Plastic Treaty failed to include binding targets for reducing virgin plastic production and lacked reparative measures for communities harmed by waste importation, highlighting the shortcomings of international legal framework.

Community-Led Solutions

In Bali, local grassroots movements, such as "Bye Bye Plastic Bags," have mobilized community volunteers to clean beaches and advocate for single-use plastic bans. These movements demonstrate the power of community-driven solutions for addressing waste. Grassroots movements like Bye Bye Plastic Bags (BBPB) in Bali have made significant contributions to reducing plastic waste and influencing local policy. A study on BBPB's role in Bali's plastic bag reduction efforts from 2013 to 2018 highlights four key strategies:

1. Raising awareness, educating the public, particularly through school presentations, about the environmental impact of plastic bags.
2. Policy advocacy, collaborating with local authorities to develop regulations limiting plastic bag usage.

3. Promoting alternatives, encouraging the use of eco-friendly alternatives to plastic bags.
4. Expanding the movement, engaging more communities and stakeholders in the cause.

The study concluded that BBPB played a crucial role in the success of Bali's plastic bag restrictions. Additionally, the movement's founders, Melati and Isabel Wijsen, have received international recognition, such as the 2017 Bambi Award for "Our Earth", further highlighting the impact of youth-led initiatives on environmental policy.

DISCUSSION

Addressing Indonesia's Plastic Pollution Crisis and Systemic Waste Colonialism. Indonesia's ongoing plastic pollution crisis offers a stark example of systemic waste colonialism, where wealthier nations exploit weaker waste management regulations in the Global South to offload their waste. This is not a new phenomenon but reflects historical patterns of colonial extraction, where the exploitation of natural resources and labor in the Global South provided the foundation for the economic prosperity of wealthier countries. In this context, environmental costs continue to be externalized, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities in developing nations.

The failure of international frameworks to adequately address these systemic issues is evident when we apply David Schlosberg's Environmental Justice Framework to Indonesia's plastic pollution crisis. Schlosberg's framework, which emphasizes equity, recognition, participation, and capabilities, sheds light on the profound injustices that manifest through global waste trade dynamics:

1. **Equity:** Wealthy nations have long benefited from cheap waste disposal options in countries like Indonesia, where weaker environmental regulations and enforcement make it easier for developed nations to offload their waste. In this way, Indonesia bears the full environmental cost of this global trade. The local population, especially in low-income areas, is left to cope with the consequences, including pollution, health crises, and declining quality of life. Meanwhile, the nation sending their waste are able to bypass these costs, continuing their high-consumption lifestyles with little regard for the repercussions elsewhere.
2. **Recognition:** Local communities in Indonesia, especially in regions like Bali, Java, and other coastal areas, are disproportionately affected by the global waste trade, yet their voices are often excluded from international environmental policy-making discussions. As plastic pollution worsens, these communities who bear the brunt of waste accumulation and environmental degradation are left out of key decision-making processes, which are largely driven by economic interests from waste-exporting countries and multinational corporations. These global entities prioritize maintaining an unsustainable waste management system that benefits their economic goals rather than addressing the real needs of those most affected by the crisis.

This systemic exclusion underscores the importance of initiatives like Rekosistem, a Jakarta-based waste management startup. Recently, Edwin Soeryadjaya's Saratoga Investama Sedaya and K3 Ventures, founded by Robert Kuok's grandson, Kuok Meng Xiong, led a \$7 million Series A funding round to support Rekosistem's expansion. The fresh capital will help Rekosistem scale its operations beyond Jakarta and Java, serving more communities and tackling the waste management challenges in the country. Currently, Rekosistem processes over 3,500 tonnes of waste per month, working with over 200 companies, including Danone, Nestle, L'Oreal, and Toyota Astra Motor. By expanding its waste collection and recycling operations, Rekosistem is setting an example of how local, community-driven solutions can effectively address the growing waste crisis. The company's focus on community involvement ensures that the people most affected by pollution have a voice in the process, making it a sustainable model for waste management. Rekosistem's expansion and success emphasize the need for inclusive policy and the involvement of local communities in the decision-making process. By empowering these communities, not only can the immediate need for clean-up and waste management be addressed, but it can also ensure long-term solutions that reflect the true needs of the people on the ground.

3. **Participation:** The top-down policies enacted by wealthier nations and international institutions often overlook the knowledge and expertise of local communities. Indonesia's gotong royong practice a deep-rooted tradition of mutual cooperation and community-based problem-solving has proven effective in addressing local waste management issues. Yet, these grassroots solutions are often dismissed or ignored in favor of broad, one-size-fits-all policies that do not account for the specific needs, cultural values, and practical realities of Indonesia's diverse communities. The exclusion of community-based knowledge further undermines Indonesia's capacity to confront the crisis in an effective and sustainable manner.
4. **Capabilities:** Pollution, particularly plastic waste, directly limits the capabilities of Indonesian citizens to live healthy, dignified lives. Prolonged exposure to contaminated environments, whether through air, water, or soil, results in an array of severe health issues, including respiratory diseases, cancers, neurological damage, and skin disorders. These health conditions further perpetuate poverty, as the ability to work, learn, and thrive is diminished. The environmental degradation caused by the waste trade not only limits the capacity of individuals to live healthy lives but also hinders broader economic development and social progress. Pollution, especially plastic waste, significantly limits the capabilities of Indonesian citizens to live healthy, dignified lives. Prolonged exposure to contaminated environments whether through polluted air, water, or soil directly leads to a range of severe health issues, including respiratory diseases, cancers, neurological damage, and skin disorders. The negative impacts on health further deepen cycles of poverty, as individuals are

unable to work, learn, or thrive due to deteriorating health. This environmental degradation, exacerbated by the global waste trade, not only hampers the ability of individuals to lead healthy lives but also stunts broader economic development and social progress.

In the Global South, particularly in countries like Indonesia, the facilities for waste disposal are significantly less advanced compared to the Global North. This disparity leads to the harmful exposure of local populations, particularly those living near landfills, dumps, and other waste disposal sites, to toxic chemicals. Workers tasked with handling these hazardous materials often receive minimal protection, making them highly vulnerable to severe health risks. For those not directly handling the waste, the exposure to polluted air and contaminated water still poses a significant threat to their health.

Research by Vrijheid (2000), which reviewed the health effects of living near hazardous waste sites, underscores the health risks faced by communities exposed to such environments. The study highlights how cancer, diabetes, neurological disorders, and other serious health conditions disproportionately affect those in proximity to waste disposal sites. The environmental degradation caused by the global waste trade not only impacts the health of individuals but also hinders economic development and social progress, as communities struggle with the consequences of inadequate waste management.

These findings reveal the urgent need for more equitable and sustainable waste management systems in the Global South. Ensuring better protection for workers and local communities from toxic waste exposure and improving waste disposal facilities is crucial for safeguarding health, enhancing capabilities, and fostering long-term sustainable development. Without these improvements, the current system will continue to limit the ability of individuals and entire communities to live healthy, dignified lives.

The critique by Alf Hornborg of the global system of unequal exchange provides further insight into Indonesia's predicament. Hornborg argues that the global waste trade functions as a form of environmental load displacement, where affluent nations externalize the environmental consequences of their consumption. In Indonesia, this manifests in the commodification of waste management, with the country becoming a "pollution sink" for the discarded materials of wealthier nations. This unequal exchange further deepens the divide between the Global North and South, as poorer nations are forced to bear the environmental and health burdens of the wealthier countries' overconsumption.

Furthermore, the lack of proper waste disposal infrastructure in Indonesia compounds the problem. While waste disposal facilities in the Global South remain underfunded and inadequate, those in wealthier nations benefit from better technological advances, stricter regulations, and enforcement. As a result, Indonesia's communities are exposed to dangerous levels of toxic chemicals, often with little protection or support from either local or international institutions. The indirect exposure through polluted air and water exacerbates public health issues, making it clear that the current global waste management system disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable populations.

Pathways Forward: Bridging the Gap and Addressing Inequities

To address these systemic inequities, several pathways forward must be explored:

Transnational accountability, one of the key recommendations is to introduce legal mechanisms, such as extraterritorial liability laws, to hold waste-exporting countries accountable for the environmental impact of their waste in countries like Indonesia. This would ensure that the nations responsible for waste generation take on a greater share of the responsibility for cleaning up the environmental damage they cause.

Circular economy models, community-led initiatives, such as the waste-to-energy projects in Bali, offer promising solutions to the waste crisis by promoting local ownership, sustainability, and innovation. These models, grounded in principles of circular economy, focus on reducing waste, reusing materials, and recycling resources within local communities, ultimately lessening dependence on global waste trade systems.

Binding production caps: To effectively address the growing plastic pollution crisis, it is essential for the UN Plastic Treaty to enforce binding production caps that mandate a reduction in virgin plastic production by at least 50% by 2030. This proactive measure would play a significant role in curbing the global demand for plastic products, directly decreasing the amount of plastic waste generated and, in turn, the volume of waste exported to countries like Indonesia.

Visser (2018), waste management systems in areas like Bali face significant challenges in handling the influx of plastic waste. The reduction in virgin plastic production would alleviate some of these pressures. By curbing plastic production at the source, we can make a critical step toward reducing plastic pollution and ensuring more sustainable waste management practices in affected regions.

Reparative funding, proposes the creation of a global fund to address environmental damage, such as plastic waste, in countries like Indonesia. This model would allocate resources for remediation projects while involving local communities to ensure the long-term sustainability of these efforts. The Global Environment Facility (GEF), established as a financial mechanism for addressing global environmental challenges, offers a useful precedent for this approach. By pooling financial resources from donor countries, the GEF has successfully financed environmental projects in developing nations and can serve as a model for a similar fund focused on pollution remediation.

The GEF's role in financing environmental initiatives is well-documented. According to Dernbach (1993), the GEF has been instrumental in helping developing nations meet their environmental obligations despite its reliance on voluntary contributions. This approach could be replicated for Reparative Funding to clean up pollution in regions heavily impacted by waste, such as Indonesia.

Freestone (2007) discusses the origins and restructuring of the GEF after the 1992 UNCED and its role in mobilizing resources for global environmental projects. The GEF's ability to partner with local actors and international financial

institutions to implement environmental solutions underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration. Similarly, Silard (1995) emphasizes the roles of the World Bank and the United Nations in global environmental governance, which further supports the idea that global cooperation can help address environmental crises like plastic pollution. A key component of the Reparative Funding model is the active involvement of local communities in the cleanup process. This aligns with the GEF's strategy, which emphasizes local engagement to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of environmental projects. By empowering local populations, the fund would not only address the immediate need for environmental remediation but also foster long-term environmental stewardship.

Cultural empowerment, incorporating *gotong royong*, Indonesia's traditional practice of community cooperation, into waste management policies could strengthen grassroots movements and foster more equitable and effective solutions. By leveraging local knowledge and community-driven approaches, Indonesia could build a more sustainable and inclusive waste management system.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Indonesia's plastic pollution crisis is not just an environmental issue; it is a reflection of global inequalities rooted in waste colonialism. The current system, in which wealthier nations externalize their waste to poorer countries, perpetuates environmental harm and deepens social and economic disparities. To transition from exploitation to justice, urgent reforms are needed that include binding production caps, reparative funding, and cultural empowerment through community-based approaches like *gotong royong*. Only by confronting the legacies of neocolonialism and recognizing the agency of marginalized communities can we begin to build a more just and sustainable global waste management system.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Indonesia's plastic pollution crisis should be understood not merely as an environmental challenge, but as a manifestation of structural global inequalities embedded in the practice of waste colonialism. The prevailing global waste regime enables wealthier nations to externalize their plastic waste to developing countries, thereby reinforcing patterns of exploitation while exacerbating socio-economic disparities and ecological vulnerability. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive structural transformation that goes beyond technical interventions, encompassing binding global policies such as production caps on plastics, reparative financing mechanisms for affected countries, and the strengthening of locally grounded, culturally embedded practices like *gotong royong*. Consequently, an effective response must also entail the decolonization of global waste governance and the recognition of marginalized communities as active agents of change, whose knowledge and collective practices are essential for advancing a more just, inclusive, and sustainable waste management system.

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