

## **A Localized Solution to a Global Crisis**

“The problem is we think we can throw things away. There is no away” (A Plastic Ocean, 2016). This line from the documentary emphasizes the reality of plastic pollution, that what we discard does not disappear. Globally, plastic production has grown to over 400 million metric tons annually, with an estimated 11 million metric tons entering the oceans every year (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021). In the Philippines, improper waste management, high consumption of single-use plastics, and limited recycling infrastructure are the main reasons why the country ranks as the third major source of ocean plastic waste worldwide (Jambeck et al., 2015). The situation in coastal provinces such as Cavite is particularly concerning due to their proximity to waterways that extend to Manila Bay. Understanding the severity of the problem, reviewing existing strategies, learning from global best practices, and developing localized solutions are essential steps toward controlling and eventually preventing long-term environmental, health, and economic damage.

The Philippines has already made several attempts to manage plastic waste through laws, local ordinances, and environmental programs. Initiatives such as the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act (Republic Act 9003), plastic bag bans in certain cities, and the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act have sought to reduce plastic generation and promote recycling. Non-governmental organizations and local community groups have also implemented coastal clean-ups and public education campaigns. Despite these efforts, the progress has been uneven. Many ordinances lack consistent enforcement, recycling rates remain low, and alternative materials are still costly for small businesses and households. The challenge lies not only in creating policies but also in ensuring that these are effectively implemented and supported by accessible infrastructure and sustained participation of the public.

Examining international examples may offer valuable lessons for our province. In the country of Rwanda, they have achieved remarkable success in controlling plastic pollution through strict nationwide bans on plastic bags, strong enforcement measures, and investment in public awareness campaigns. The success in Rwanda originates from the combined political will, community involvement, and strict compliance checks. South Korea has also implemented advanced waste segregation and recycling systems, supported by incentives and penalties to encourage public participation. While the Philippine context differs in terms of economic capacity and governance structures, elements of these approaches can be adapted. In Cavite, a localized strategy that combines strict regulation, public education, accessible alternatives to single-use plastics, and active monitoring could replicate the successes we've seen from other countries.

To make these strategies effective, Cavite can establish a comprehensive plastic control program that prioritizes waste reduction directly from the source. This begins with a phased elimination of single-use plastics, starting with the most common items such as plastic bags, straws, and sachet packaging, while setting a clear timeline for complete phase out. Alongside regulation, the province can promote the use of locally produced biodegradable and reusable alternatives such as woven bayong bags, bamboo utensils, and refillable containers. Expanding materials recovery facilities (MRFs) in every barangay will also ensure that recyclable and compostable materials are properly segregated, processed, and diverted away from landfills. By

practicing waste reduction habits early and reinforcing them consistently, Cavite can promote a long-lasting behavioral change.

Apart from waste reduction, awareness campaigns should be strengthened. It must not be limited to occasional events. It can be integrated into schools, barangay programs, and local business initiatives. Public participation can be further encouraged through incentive programs such as discounts for customers who bring their own containers or recognition for barangays with exemplary waste management records.

Considering collaboration with private sectors may also help in subsidizing eco-friendly alternatives. Businesses could receive tax incentives or subsidies in exchange for investing in sustainable packaging, funding recycling infrastructure, or supporting local producers of biodegradable goods. Consistent law enforcement must also be observed to regulate non-compliance. Fair but firm penalties will ensure that regulations are not merely symbolic.

In order to sustain these efforts, regular data tracking on waste generation, segregation compliance, and collection efficiency should be mandated. Publicly sharing these findings can foster accountability and motivate continuous improvement. Finally, the program must be resilient to disruptions. Cavite should prepare a contingency plan that includes emergency waste collection during natural disasters, mobile segregation units for evacuation centers, and a rapid communication framework to keep residents informed during crises. By anticipating and planning for such scenarios, the province can ensure that plastic management efforts remain effective and minimally disrupted even in the face of unexpected challenges.

Addressing plastic pollution is more than just a one-time clean-up drive. It requires consistent enforcement, active community participation, and long-term policy commitment. The responsibility falls on every individual and institution to be part of the solution, not the source of the problem. The data and solutions are already there, they only call for immediate action. Cavite has the opportunity to lead by example, proving that local action can make a substantial contribution to solving a global crisis. As *A Plastic Ocean* (2016) warns us, "If we don't act now, the plastic in our oceans will outweigh the fish by 2050." The choice is clear: either continue on the path of unchecked pollution or take decisive action to create a cleaner, healthier environment. We cannot afford to delay. It's time to reduce, replace, and recover plastics before our environment, economy, and health pay an irreversible price.

## References

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