

"How do we solve the plastic pollution problem"

The sound of heavy rain pounding against the tin roofs is a familiar and draining wake-up call for us. It signals the start of a day marked by grey skies and relentless downpours, serving as a reminder that there will be another exploitation of the term "resiliency of Filipino families" in marginalized and underserved sectors. For far too long, traditional households have been misled into prioritizing resilience over safety, equipping heavy rainfall. However, the majority of us remain uninformed about the precise factors that cause floods to surge rapidly. Most concerning, some individuals disregard climate realities and shirk their responsibility to mitigate its harsh impacts—particularly those with social and political consciousness—while climate crises and environmental disaster continue to affect local communities.

It is evident that a crucial determinant of the increased vulnerability of grassroots communities to flooding is the unchecked and excessive plastic manufacturing practices of large corporations, compounded by poor public consumption habits. As consumerism continues to dominate the digital landscape, the environmental costs of our addiction to convenience and disposability are becoming painfully apparent. Like so many others, I often choose the availability of online shopping without considering its impact on the environment. The plastic packaging used for deliveries contributes to the growing pollution problem, especially when not properly disposed of. It often ends up in landfills or our oceans, causing even more harm.

DATE _____

while it's easy to overlook, the environmental cost of our shopping habits is something we don't always account for. I still remember playing in floodwaters filled with plastic debris without any understanding of how contaminated and unhealthy the water was. Now, watching other children in the same community to do the same thing without understanding of how the dangers, I am left to ask: "Is there any way we can truly eradicate plastic pollution?"

The idea of achieving zero plastic waste may be unrealistic, and it is an overwhelming problem for many communities as well as, including mine. Growing up in Taytay, a town known for its thriving garment industry, I have witnessed how plastic is deeply embedded in our daily lives. From the markets to the streets, plastic waste is everywhere. The reality is that achieving zero plastic waste is a challenging goal, especially considering the economic struggles many families face. For small vendors and market sellers, switching to eco-friendly packaging can be a luxury they simply cannot afford. The same issue applies to large corporations, such as sachet packaging for necessities. But what exactly can be done to implement sustainable solutions that effectively mitigate its far-reaching consequences? There needs to be a clear foundation guiding both communities and large corporation in managing waste and reducing plastic use. Local government leaders and barangay officials should push for programs addressing the specific waste problem of their communities and supporting local people directly.

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In Tagkayawan, Quezon, a deposit return system allows citizen to exchange used plastic containers and bottles for access to public Wi-Fi, effectively promoting eco-friendly habits while empowering young student, out-of-school youth, and the community.

We also need to hold both large and small corporation more accountable for how they produce goods, especially when it comes to plastic pollution. Many companies claim to support corporate social responsibility (CSR) and present themselves as committed to sustainability. However, while some CSR programs directly address environmental issues—such as reducing plastic waste or switching to eco-friendly packaging—others choose to invest in less costly alternatives, such as scholarship grants. While those efforts can benefit students, they do little to tackle the growing crisis of plastic pollution. In reality, many corporations avoid taking stronger environmental action because it requires a larger investment and may cut into their profits. Worse, some maintain surface-level commitments while continuing harmful production practices, contributing further to plastic waste and environmental damage.

Moreover, it is crucial to draft policy recommendations firmly aligned with the realities faced by grassroots communities. Policies must be crafted with an intersectional lens—recognizing the unique challenges all sector face. For women, especially those in rural and

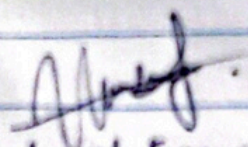
and underprivileged areas, plastic pollution has intensified existing inequalities. In many communities, women are the primary caretaker of both households and the environment. They collect water, manage waste, and maintain food security. Yet, they are often left without the resources or the voice to advocate for sustainable practices. For fishermen, the impact of plastic pollution is even more dire. Our seas, once rich in biodiversity, are now choked by plastic debris, which not only threatens marine life but also destroys the livelihoods of local fishermen who depend on healthy oceans. Ghost nets—discarded fishing gear—entangle marine animals, while microplastic infiltrate the food chain, reducing the quality and quantity of catch. Farmers are also caught in this web. The growing prevalence of food production and the health of the soil. Plastic bags, wrappers, and containers end up in fields, creating unsustainable farming conditions that poison the soil and harm crops. Worse, microplastic infiltrate the food chain, creating health hazards for both farmers and consumers. Lastly, the LGBTQIA+ community, often at the margins of environmental and social discourse, is also deeply affected by plastic pollution, though in ways not often discussed. Many members of the LGBTQIA+ community are among the most vulnerable, with limited access to resources, including healthcare and housing, especially in rural and deprived regions. In these areas, the burden of environmental disaster falls hardest on those already marginalized. The lack of inclusive policies addressing both the environment and social needs of these groups means the intersection of social inequality and environmental degradation often goes unnoticed.

In line with this, there must be a sustainable project with adequate allocation of funds. The alarming rise in unrecycled plastics must be urgently addressed and prioritized through strengthened local agreement between communities, the government, and corporations. Major companies should be mandated to release transparent reports detailing the specific actions they take in the production and management of plastic related products. Rather than pouring resources into ineffective and superficial awareness campaigns, these corporations must implement tangible, results-driven solutions - without using token portions of their profits to fund campaigns that mask their rising environmental risks and inefficiency. Instead, every corporation must invest in establishing their own dedicated facilities outside the community's waste management system, ensuring that recyclable materials are properly processed and non-recyclables are minimized. Furthermore, they should enforce comprehensive bans on non-essential single-use plastics - such as straws, utensils, and excessive packaging - replacing them with sustainable alternatives that benefit both the environment and the community.

As I stand at the edge of the same floodwaters I once played in, now burdened with even more plastic debris, a deeper realization settles in. This isn't just about the visible waste or the environmental damage; it's about the systematic failures that allow this plastic to pile up—failures that impact those with the least power to change them. For years, plastic pollution has been a silent burden on the most affected groups. This interconnectedness of sector—women, fishermen, farmers, and the LGBTQIA+ community—reveals deep systemic nature of the plastic crisis. These communities suffer the most from both the lack of infrastructure and toxic consequences of unchecked consumption. But their resilience, even in the face of these challenges, provides a blueprint for how we might begin to address the root causes of plastic crisis.

the fight must be a collective one—because the responsibility is not just on large corporations or government, but on every sector, every community, every individual. It is a struggle that must include the voice and needs of those who bear the heaviest burdens. In my own community, I've learned that the fight for sustainability is, above all, a fight for justice—for the women who carry the weight of waste, for the fisherman whose livelihoods are drowning in plastic for the farmer whose lands are poisoned, and for the marginalized group whose voices have too often been left out of the conversation. The question is not only how to eradicate plastic pollution, but how to build a future that is inclusive, sustainable, and equitable for all. Only when we acknowledge the interconnectedness of our struggle will we be able to rise above the

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Michael Enric Nypala

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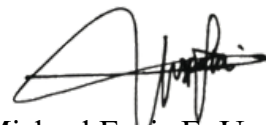
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Enric E. Uypala', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

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