



Empower | Innovate | Sustain



Nationwide Waste Education Campaign





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Designed by ***Lyme***Haus

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FOREWORD

As we mark a decade of impact at RUG, I am proud to introduce this Waste Management Educational Handbook, a testament to our unwavering commitment to environmental education and sustainability. Over the past ten years, RUG has worked tirelessly to empower young Ghanaians with the knowledge and tools to tackle climate and waste management challenges head-on.

This handbook serves as a practical guide to instill sustainable waste management practices in schools and communities. It is designed to educate, inspire, and equip students, educators, and change-makers with actionable solutions to reduce waste, promote recycling, and embrace a circular economy.

At RUG, we believe that real change begins with education and action. By integrating waste management principles into learning spaces, we are nurturing the next generation of environmental leaders who will champion sustainability in Ghana and beyond.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to our partners, educators, and stakeholders who have contributed to the development of this handbook. May this resource serve as a catalyst for a cleaner, greener future.

ABDULRAHIM SHAIKU-ISSAH

Executive Director – **RUG**

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1.

General Introduction

General Introduction

Imagine being in Ghana on a hot, sunny day. The tropical sun is blazing down on you. The trotros and taxis are honking as they look for passengers, filling the air with the smell of petrol. The streets are packed with people. Women carry silver trays on their heads, with pyramids of sachet water, and having their babies safely tied on their backs.

Children are laughing and playing in every corner you look. People are moving to the lively rhythms of Djembe drums and West African music, while you can hear the soft sound of women making traditional Fufu in big wooden bowls.

The markets are busy with colourful Kente fabrics and fresh fruits. But among all this beauty, there's one thing that disturbs your view. It's like a black

spot on your eye that you can't ignore. It's plastic waste—everywhere you look: in the streets, the markets, and the gutters. Plastic waste is a big problem in Ghana, affecting everyone, from young to the aged.



The United Nations Development Programme (2019) reports that over

1million tonnes of plastic waste are generated in Ghana each year.

Out of this, 38% ends up on landfill sites, 28% on land, 23% in the sea, and 11% are burned.

Only between 2-5% is recovered for recycling.

These outcomes have negative implications on human health and the environment with a strong bearing on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6, 13, 14, 15 among others.

Ghana is one of the 10 most polluted countries in the world. Lots of poorly treated plastic waste is ruining the environment, especially in crowded cities. Streets, open spaces, rivers, and beaches are covered in plastic bags, bottles, and colourful wrappers.

This pollution causes many problems including:

1. Open drains getting clogged, leading to floods and diseases.
2. Burning plastic waste releases dangerous toxins.
3. Unsecured landfills cause air pollution and can pollute groundwater.
4. Plastic in the ocean harms marine life.

The problem is big because many people don't realize how harmful plastic pollution is, and there isn't enough infrastructure for proper waste management. The government hasn't yet set up a strong system that creates jobs and makes positive environmental changes yet. As a result, private companies are leading waste management efforts in the country.



RUG, one of the private companies leading waste management efforts, helps young people in Ghana deal with waste problems through educational programs.

They use a three-phase approach:

1. **Knowledge Phase:** Sharing educational content in project partner schools.
2. **Experience Phase:** Providing training and hands-on workshops for practice.
3. **Solutions Phase:** Using knowledge and experience to create practical solutions for the community.



RUG aims to create affordable and effective projects that can help improve the economy and reduce waste. They also use various texts and videos to teach about possible solutions for plastic waste management in communities.

The methodology is based on a three-phase approach.

Phase 1



Knowledge phase

Comprising the educational content sharing in project partner schools.

Phase 2



Experience phase

Comprising the provision of a training platform for our members and participants to gain work experience, put theory into practice through volunteering amongst other hands-on workshops and industry exposures.

Phase 3



Solutions phase

Which is to put the knowledge and experiences to use and create long-lasting solutions for society.

This can be achieved through the creation of practical hands-on projects that are feasible, inexpensive and above all will be able to turn the economy around and or a variety of text and videos to learn about possible solutions that can be implemented in their community (National Geographic, 2023).



About RUG's Nationwide Waste Education Campaign (NWEK)

The waste challenge in Ghana, especially plastic, is alarming. This is mainly because people aren't well-informed about proper waste management and there isn't enough support or infrastructure to handle it. To help with this issue, RUG started the Recycle Up Summer Camp. The camp aimed to teach senior high school students in Kumasi, Accra, and Cape Coast (which are major waste hotspots) how to manage waste properly. This initiative is very important for training the next generation of environmental leaders. Because of its significance, external donors decided to support the Nationwide Waste Education Campaign (NWEK) in 2019.

The NWEK since have seen several achievements including:

1. Empowered 81,000 students from basic to senior high school.
2. Trained over 108 waste ambassadors.
3. Distributed 810 dustbins to help with sorting waste.
4. Conducted about 540 educational activities in schools.
5. Collected around 340 tonnes of plastic waste.



The RUG Nationwide Waste Education Campaign aims to instill a habit of proper waste management education and other environmentally sound practices among the Ghanaian youth between the ages of 9 to 17 years through targeting primary, junior high and senior high schools across Accra, Cape Coast and Kumasi.

The campaign uses three main methods to teach students

- **Raising Awareness:** Informing students about waste management and environmental practices.
- **Hands-On Learning:** Giving students practical experiences with waste management.
- **Providing Facilities:** Setting up places where students can sort PET bottles and water sachets. This project supports all of RUG's other activities and goals.

This project complements all of RUG's ongoing activities:

1

Education and Waste Management in Ghana

One of the biggest challenges with waste management in Ghana is that many people don't have enough education about it, and there isn't enough support or resources to manage waste properly. To address this, we run the Nationwide Waste Education Campaign (NWEK) and organize clean-up activities. These programs teach schools and local communities how to reduce, reuse, and recycle waste.

Our ambassadorship program also helps women who collect waste and young people to become leaders in their communities, spreading awareness about protecting the environment.



2

Segregation & Collection

Using an incentive-based scheme, plastic buy-back centers are connected to participating schools to help collect the plastic wastes generated.

These buy-back centers serve as a residential drop-off point for collected plastic wastes. Specially labeled bins are distributed to schools to be used for plastic waste segregation to enable easier handling after pick up.

Scheduled pick-up days and times are arranged to facilitate easier collection of plastic waste.

3

Transportation

Once the plastic waste is sorted and collected from schools and community centres, it is transported using tricycles. These tricycles take the waste to aggregation sites where it can be sorted and prepared for further processing.

4

Plastic Waste Recycling Activities & Innovation Center

In this phase, we use creative methods to give plastic waste a new life through fun educational activities. Students learn how to make things like school bags and phone covers from plastic waste. We also set up recycling hubs where the plastic waste is further processed and recycled.



The main goal of this waste education handbook is to be a helpful guide for teaching environmental education and waste management in schools across Ghana.



2.



How plastics
became a lifestyle

How plastics became a lifestyle

Why history is important for today's action.

Plastic was first used because it was cheap and practical, and it soon became a popular symbol of success. However, waste management systems didn't grow as fast as plastic production, so countries struggled to handle the large amounts of plastic waste.

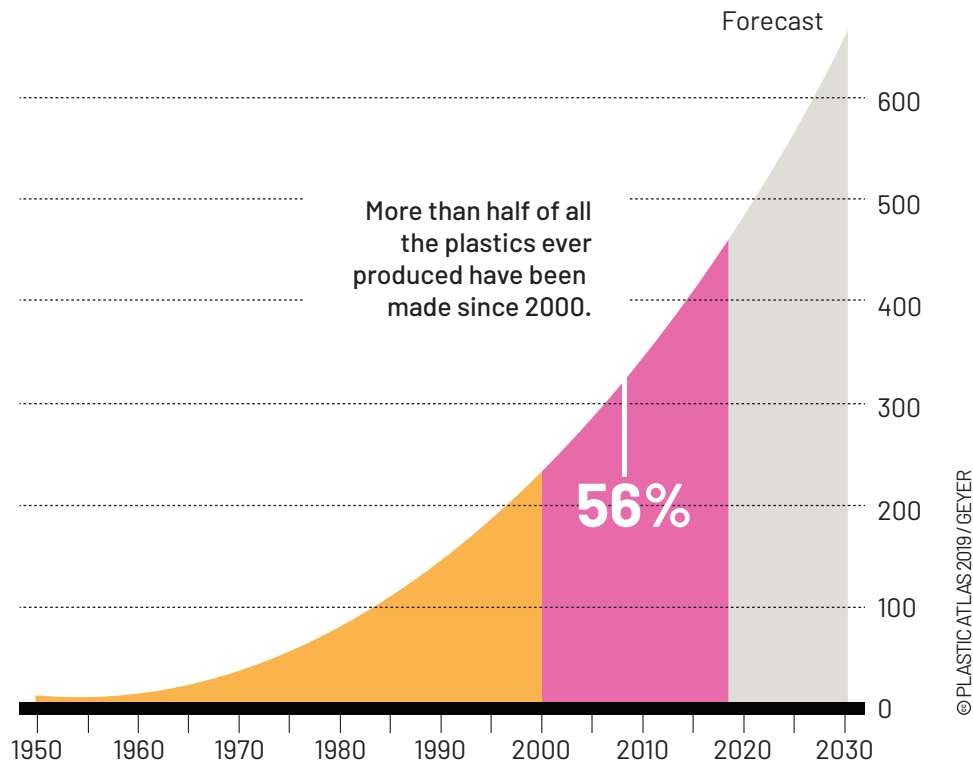
Both nature and people are affected by this problem. Learning from past experiences can help us manage plastic better in the future. In West Africa, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, people started using plastic for packaging food and drinks instead of traditional materials like leaf wrappers, brown paper, and metal cups that were already in use.

Plastic replaced more expensive and less durable materials like glass and aluminium, starting what we call the plastic revolution. By the early 2000s, Ghana had about 40 companies making plastic products, producing around 26,000 metric tons of plastic each year. In addition to that, over 10,000 metric tons of plastic were imported each year.

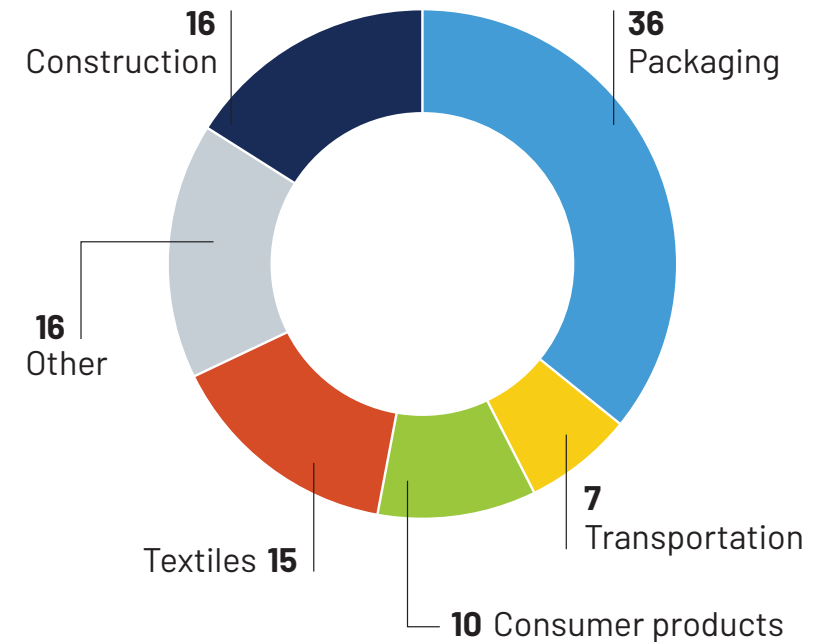
In Accra alone, about 300 tonnes of plastic waste is created every day—that's as heavy as three blue whales combined. Plastic has become something people throw away quickly. About one-third of all plastic is used for packaging, and about 40% of plastic is wasted after less than a month.

PLASTIC PLANET

Global annual plastic production in million tonnes



Estimated consumption of plastic by end-use sector

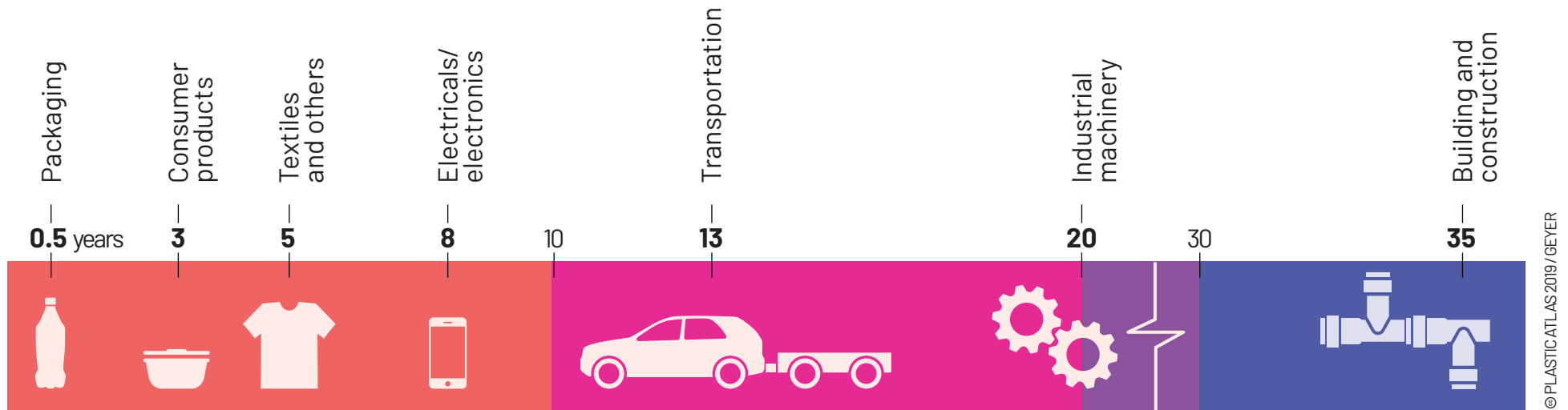


Source: R. Geyer, J. R. Jambeck and K. L. Law

© DW

LIFE IS SHORT

Average useful life of various plastic items, by industrial sector, in years



There is not enough infrastructure to manage all the plastic waste we create. As a result, plastic waste ends up littering cities, villages, and the environment, causing pollution. This also harms people. Since plastic waste management is not included in the school curriculum in Ghana, many people don't know how to handle plastic properly. But we can change that together!

Exercises:

Let's practice!

Think about plastic in your daily life.

? **How much plastic goes through your hands?**

? **How long is it used for and how do you dispose of it?**

To identify the type of plastic, take a closer look at the bottom or side of the item.

Collect all the plastic you consume for a whole day and weigh it at the end.

? **If you extrapolate the weight x365 days to a year, how much plastic would you have?**

? **Where do you stand in comparison to the average of your country?**

Plastic weight of today, : kg/day

..... kg x 365 days = per year



? Discuss in class: What are habits you can implement to decrease your plastic consumption?

? Ask older members of your family how they managed things like grocery shopping differently in the past. What can we learn from that?

VARIETIES OF PLASTICS.

Product	Types of plastic	Duration of use	Disposal
Water bottle	PET	3h	Collection at school

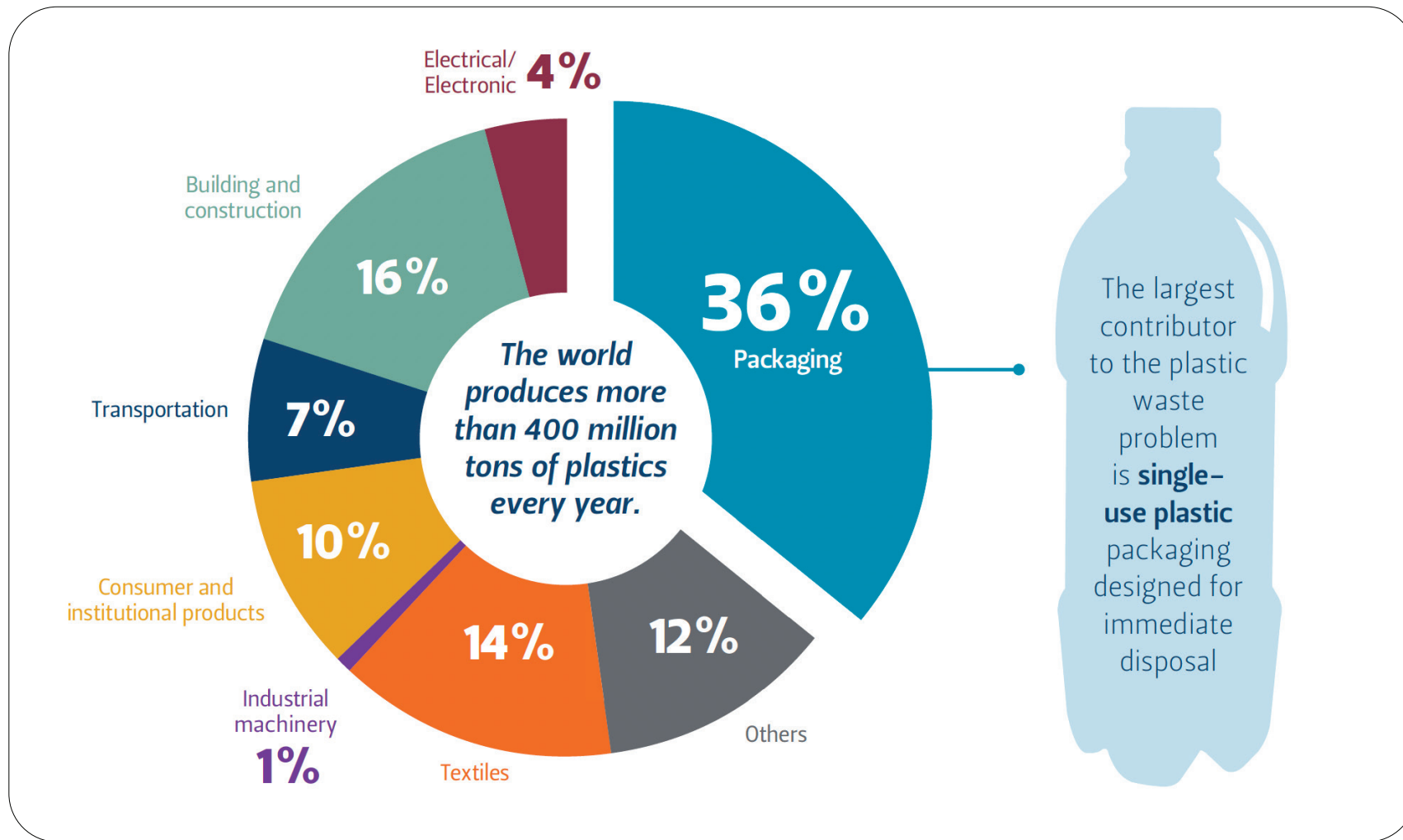


There are two main kinds of plastic: soft plastics and hard plastics. Soft plastics can be melted, reshaped, or recycled over and over again. Hard plastics are different. Once they are hardened, they can't be changed or melted again. There are also rubbery materials that can't be melted, but they are stretchy and elastic. When it comes to recycling, each type of plastic needs a different process to be reused. Each plastic item has a special code that shows what type of plastic it is and how it can be recycled.

As far as disposal and recycling possibilities are concerned, each material has to go through different processes in order to be reused. Each plastic product is therefore marked with a code indicating its recycling potential by specifying the type of plastic it is made of.

 THE SEVEN TYPES OF PLASTIC	 1) Polyethylene Terephthalate (PETE) Used in: Clear bottles (look for a 'bubble' on the bottom of a bottle), food trays (clear, green, black etc.). Recycled? One of the most commonly recycled plastics, clear bottles are likely to be recycled, remove lids first. Looks like? A tough plastic which discolours if you bend it.
 2) High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) Used in: White milk bottles all sizes, bleach type bottles, washing machine liquids and some bottle caps. Recycled? Very commonly recycled, remove lids first. Looks like? A thick tough plastic which will spring back if bent, caps can usually be flexed.	 3) Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC - U) Used in: Clear bottles (look for a line on the bottom of the bottle), food trays, toys, piping, wire insulation. Recycled? Rarely recycled, check your local area. Looks like? More fragile and will crack and/or star bent if stressed, bottles make a 'crinkle' cracking sound if squeezed.
 4) Low Density Polyethylene (LDPE) Used in: Plastic bags, plastic wrapping, cling film. Recycled? Reuse of bags and targeted collection in supermarkets most likely, dispose of materials contaminated with food. Looks like? Can be very thin to thick, but usually flexible and easily torn.	 5) Polypropylene (PP) Used in: Butter and margarine tubs, clear fresh soup containers, some bottle caps, glass jar caps. Recycled? Not generally recycled, check your local area. Looks like? Will shatter into stripes if compressed, caps will usually be too hard to flex.
 6) Polystyrene or Styrofoam (PS) Used in: Yoghurt pots, insulated disposable cups, some trays, parcel packaging. Recycled? Not generally recycled, check your local area. Looks like? Will tear or pull apart depending on the form.	 7) OTHER Used in: Reading glasses, CDs, DVDs and cases, some electrical connections, wiring, general household plastics. Recycled? Reuse of items more likely, avoid placing in your recycling unless specifically instructed to do so. Looks like? The majority of these plastics are very tough and are likely to shatter if pressure is applied.

To learn about the different types of plastics, how they are different, and which ones can be recycled, check the guide on the left.



Exercises:

Let's practice!

Look around your home or neighborhood.

- ? Can you find a product for every type of plastic?
- ? Which plastic do you use the most?

Types of plastic	What I found	Usage per day
1 PET		
2 HDPE		
3 PVC		
4 LDPE		
5 PP		
6 PS		
7 Others		



Connect the icon pictures with the correct type of plastic



PET

PP

PS

LDPE

HDPE

PVC



Outlook

Different types of plastics are used to make different products. Some plastics are more likely to end up as litter in nature than others. Plastic in the environment comes in different sizes. Big pieces of plastic break down into smaller pieces over time.

These small pieces are called microplastics. We will explain why this happens and how it affects the environment and people in the next chapter.



3.

Plastics and human



The true cost of plastics to the environment

Plastics are everywhere on Earth. They help in many good ways, like in medical devices, space travel, cars, and helmets. But they also cause problems, like polluting beaches, the air, and water, and harming the food chain. Every time we use plastic, it releases gases that are bad for the environment.

This happens at every stage: from making the plastic from oil, using it, and even when it breaks down or burns. Since 99% of plastics are made from fossil fuels, their production is harmful. Plastic doesn't fully decompose. Instead, it breaks into smaller pieces called microplastics.

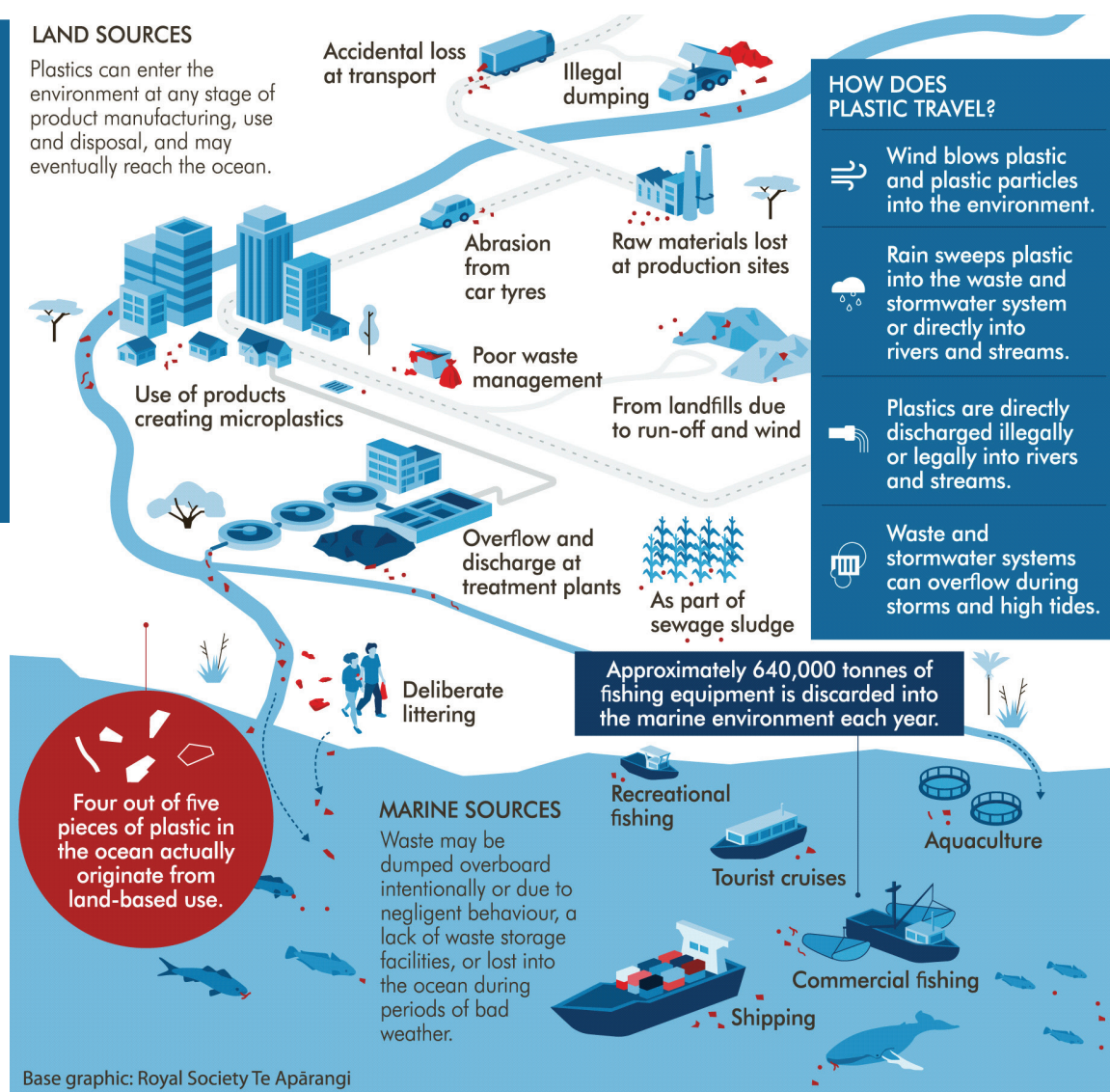
These tiny pieces are found even in the most remote places on Earth. Wind and water spread

plastic over long distances. Some plastic that ends up on land travels through rivers to the sea. Did you know that 80% of the plastic in the ocean comes from land, not from ships or fishing?

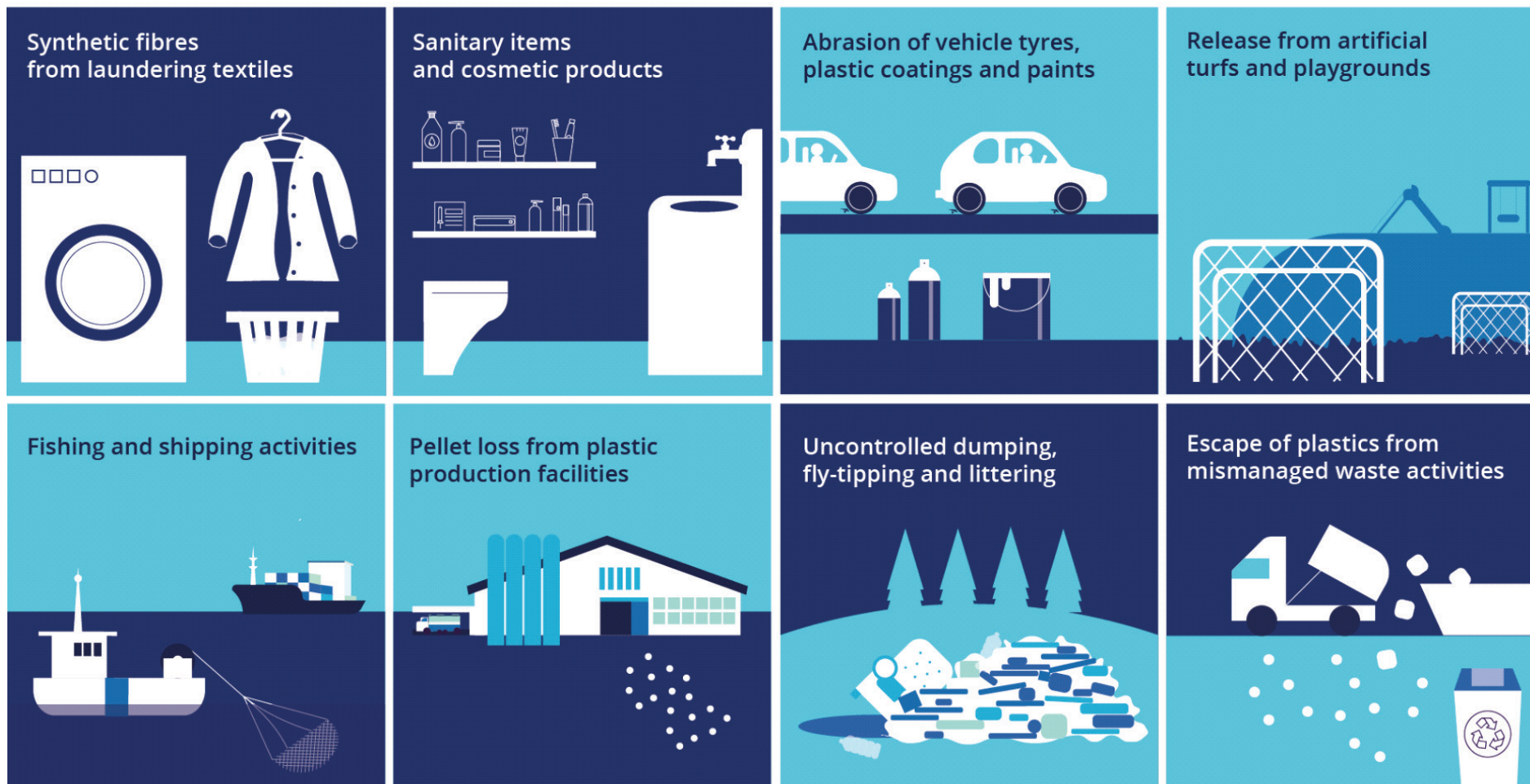


Plastic pollution sources and pathways

Even things we don't think about, like washing synthetic clothes or driving cars, add to plastic pollution because they release tiny plastic fibres and particles.



There are many sources of plastics in the environment, including:



Plastics spread to the environment through, for example:



Exercises:

Let's practice!

Look at the list of products and how long they take to break down.

- ? Can you match each product?
- ? Did you know?
- ? What surprises you?

Product	Degradation time
1 - Plastic bottle	A - 1-5 years
2 - Cigarettes	B - 2-5 months
3 - Cotton shirt	C - 10 years
4 - Fishing line	D - 450 years
5 - Plastic bag	E - 600 years



Compare the **2** pictures and write what you see



The impact of plastic to humans' health

According to the Plastic Health Coalition (*plastic pollution coalition, 2019*), plastics may affect our health via three pathways.

1

Every day, we eat, drink, and breathe in tiny plastic pieces called microplastics. These small bits of plastic can be harmful to our health once they get inside our bodies.

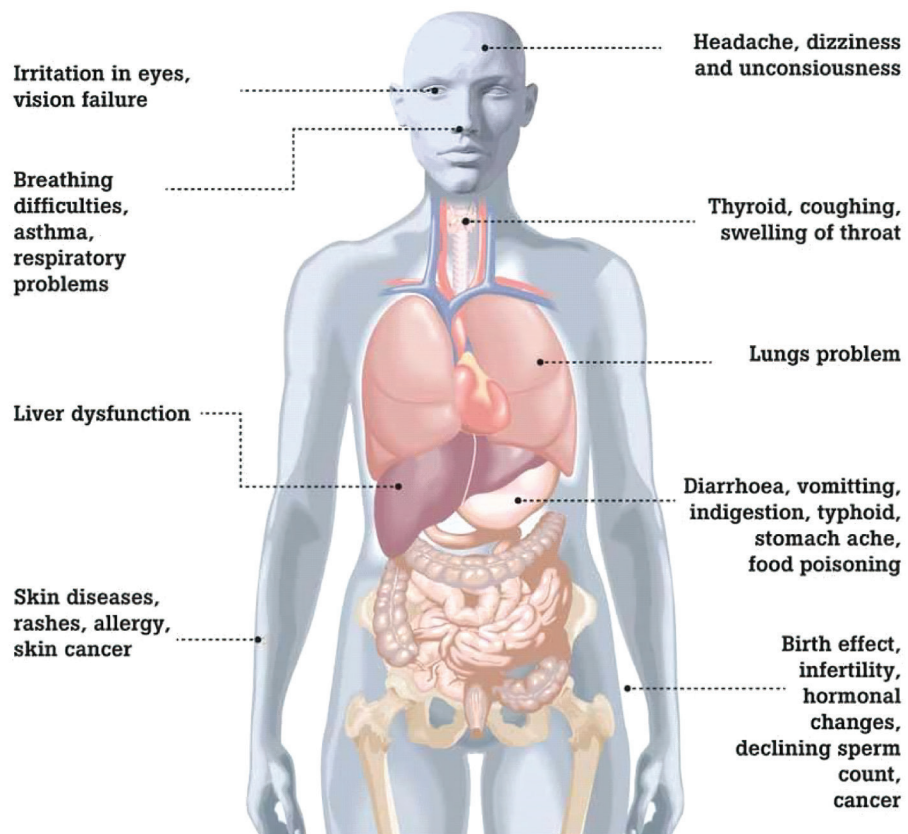
2

Plastic products often have chemicals added to them. Some of these chemicals can cause serious health problems, like cancers related to hormones, difficulties having babies, and issues with brain development.

3

When plastics and microplastics get into nature, they can attract tiny germs and harmful bacteria. If we come into contact with these germs through microplastics, it might increase our chances of getting sick.

Fig 1: Plastic impact on human health



Soil pollution



Water pollution

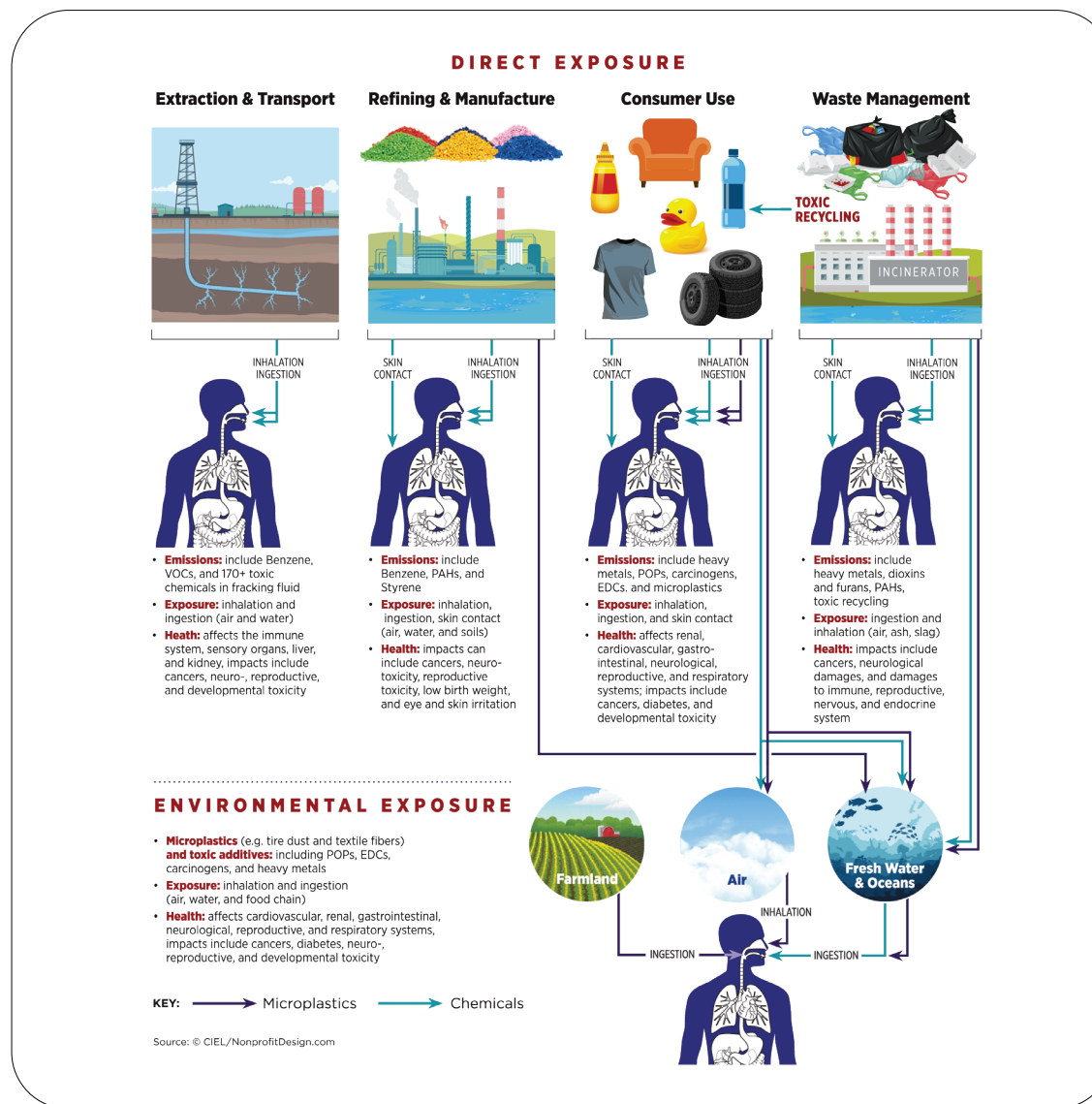


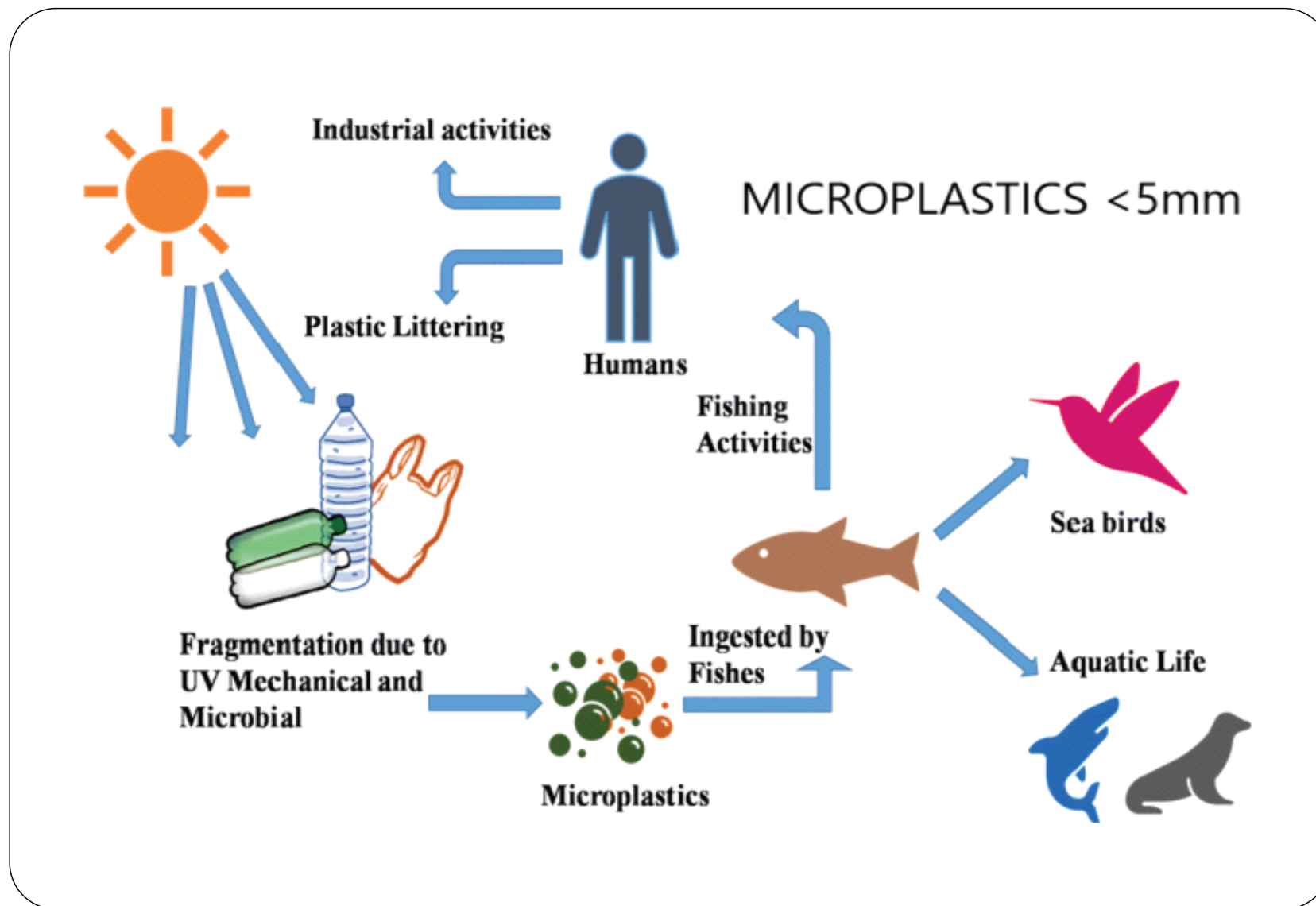
Air pollution



Fig 2:
Plastic & Health:
The Hidden Cost of a Plastic Planet

Humans are exposed to a large variety of toxic chemicals and microplastic through inhalation, ingestion and direct skin contact, all along the plastic lifecycle.

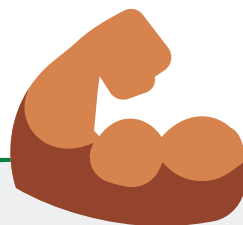




Exercises: Let's practice!

? **Talk with a partner: How do you think plastic that isn't thrown away properly ends up in rivers and oceans?**

? **Read the story about Ama below and discuss what Ama could do to solve the problem.**



Let's look at the daily routine of 16-year-old Ama:

Ama uses firewood to cook traditional fufu with cassava and plantain. She lights a piece of plastic on fire to help start the fire for cooking. She does this three times a day, every day.

Ama starts having breathing problems, coughing, and headaches, and her eyes water from the smoke. Even though she knows it makes her feel sick, she says plastic is "easier to burn, easier to find, and much cheaper."

Ama's routine shows why we need to learn more about handling plastic waste properly. The real problem isn't plastic itself, but how we handle it.

It's better to throw plastic in the trash than to litter, but we should also try to recycle it. Plastic can stay in landfills for many, many years, so recycling is important.



4.



Global dimensions of plastic waste

Global dimensions of plastic waste

There are about 165 million tons of plastic floating in the sea. This plastic is dangerous for sea animals. Marine creatures can get caught in big pieces of plastic, like bags or old fishing nets. Too many plastic pieces can upset the balance of the sea and harm the food chain. Plastic on land doesn't fully break down; it just gets smaller and smaller.

Animals might mistake plastic for food or eat plastic that still has leftover food on it. This can make them sick or even kill them if they can't move or eat.

Studies show that nearly 75% of fish caught by the ocean's top predators have tiny pieces of plastic in them.



The following graphs show how plastic pollution is growing around the world. Have a look at them for more details.

Fig 1: How much plastic is made around the world and by which countries?

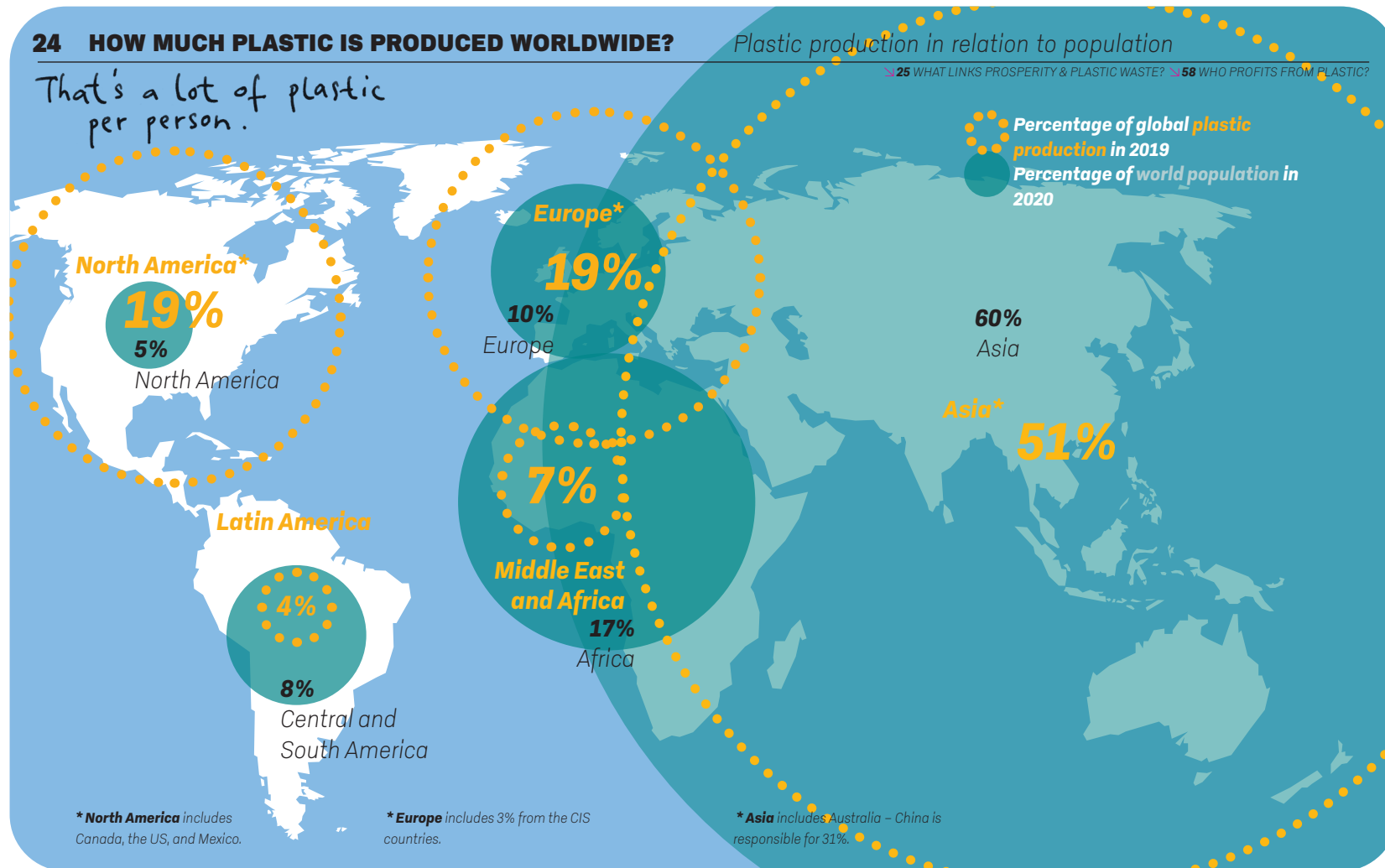


Fig 2: How is plastic waste connected to wealth and prosperity?**25 WHAT LINKS PROSPERITY & PLASTIC WASTE?***With prosperity comes responsibility*

↘ 30 WHERE DOES GERMAN WASTE GO? ↘ 58 WHO PROFITS FROM PLASTIC?

The World Bank classifies countries into four income groups – high, upper middle, lower middle, and low. Low income countries are not shown.

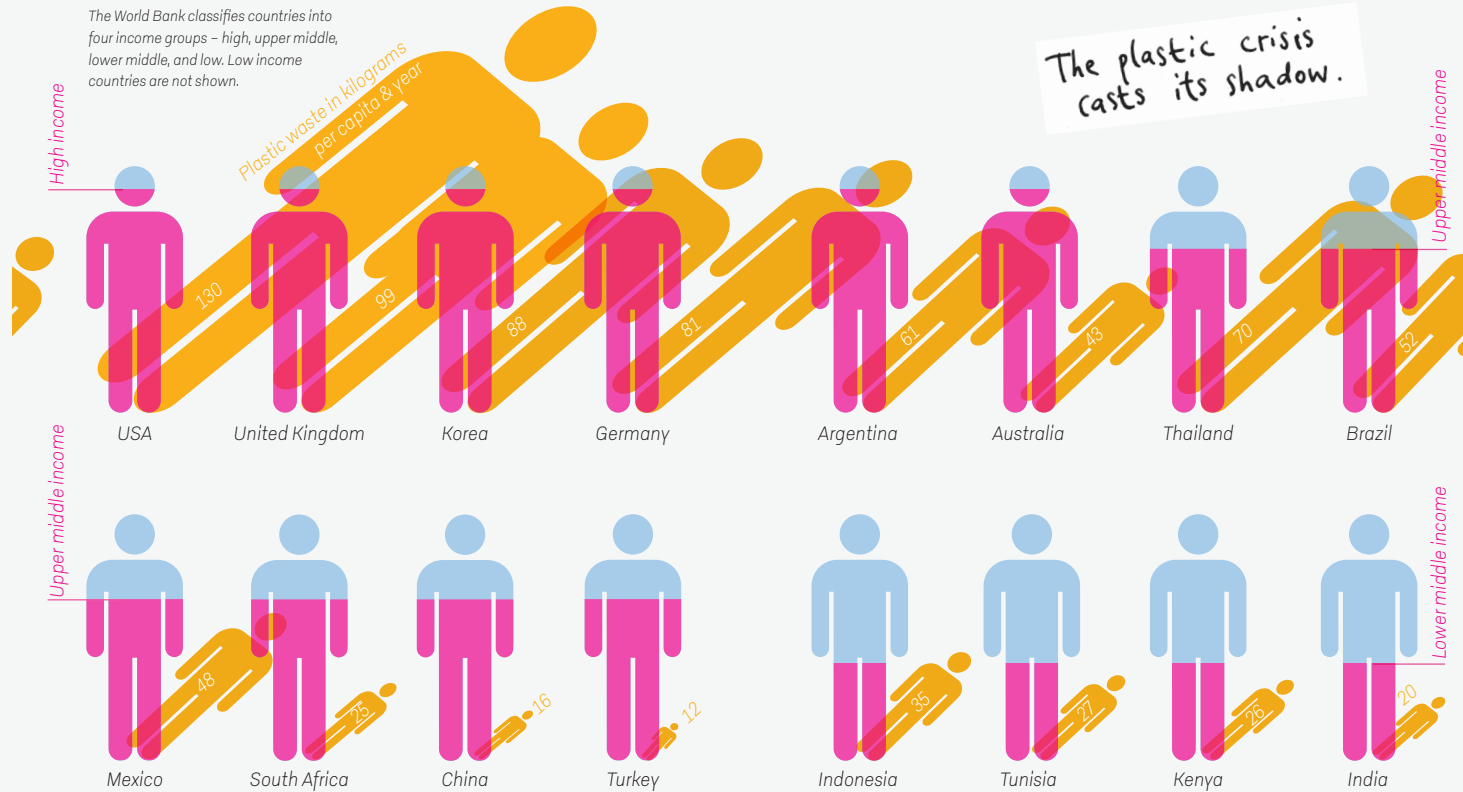


Fig 3: Where does plastic waste float in the sea?

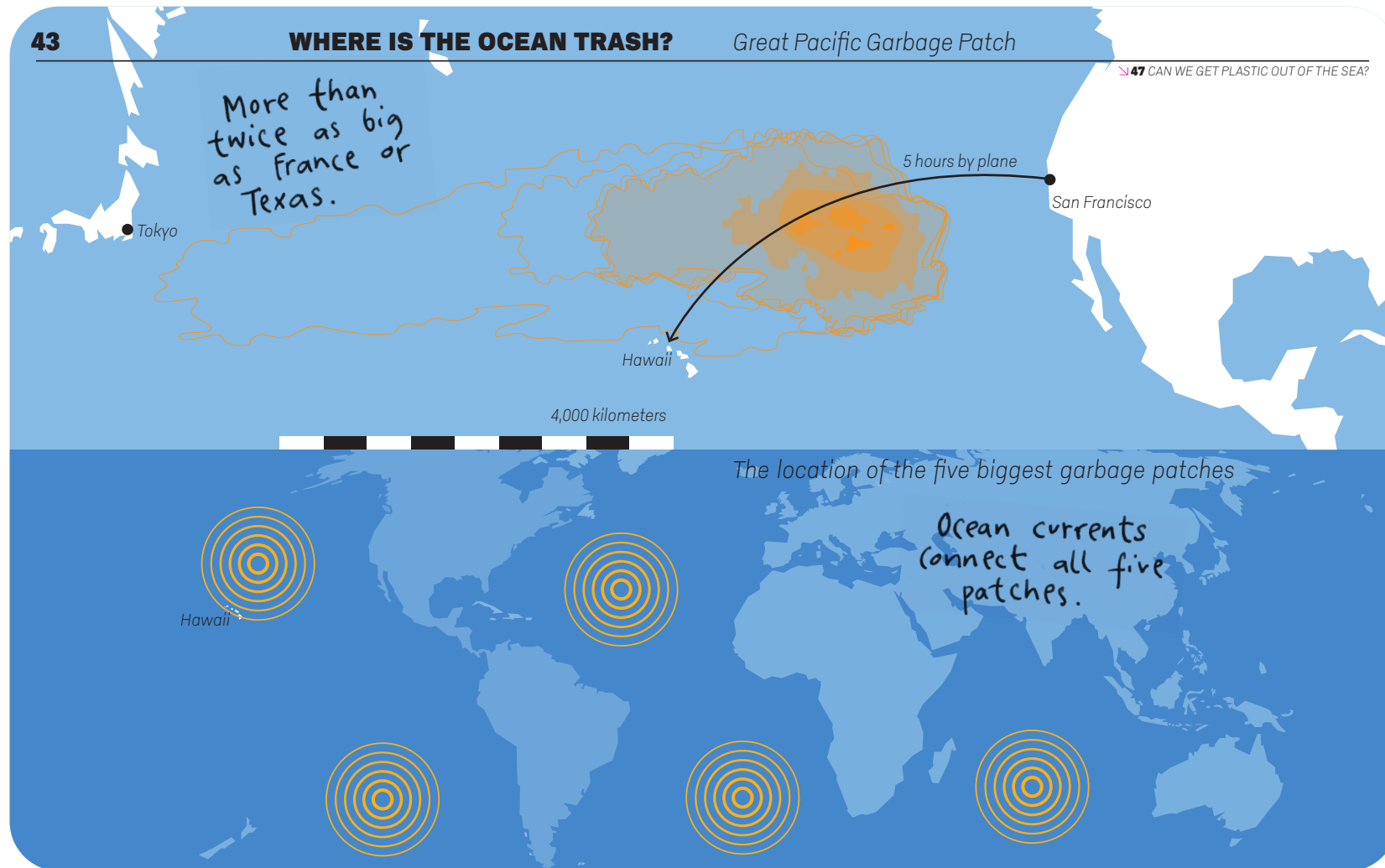


Fig 4: Big piles of trash from top consumer goods companies

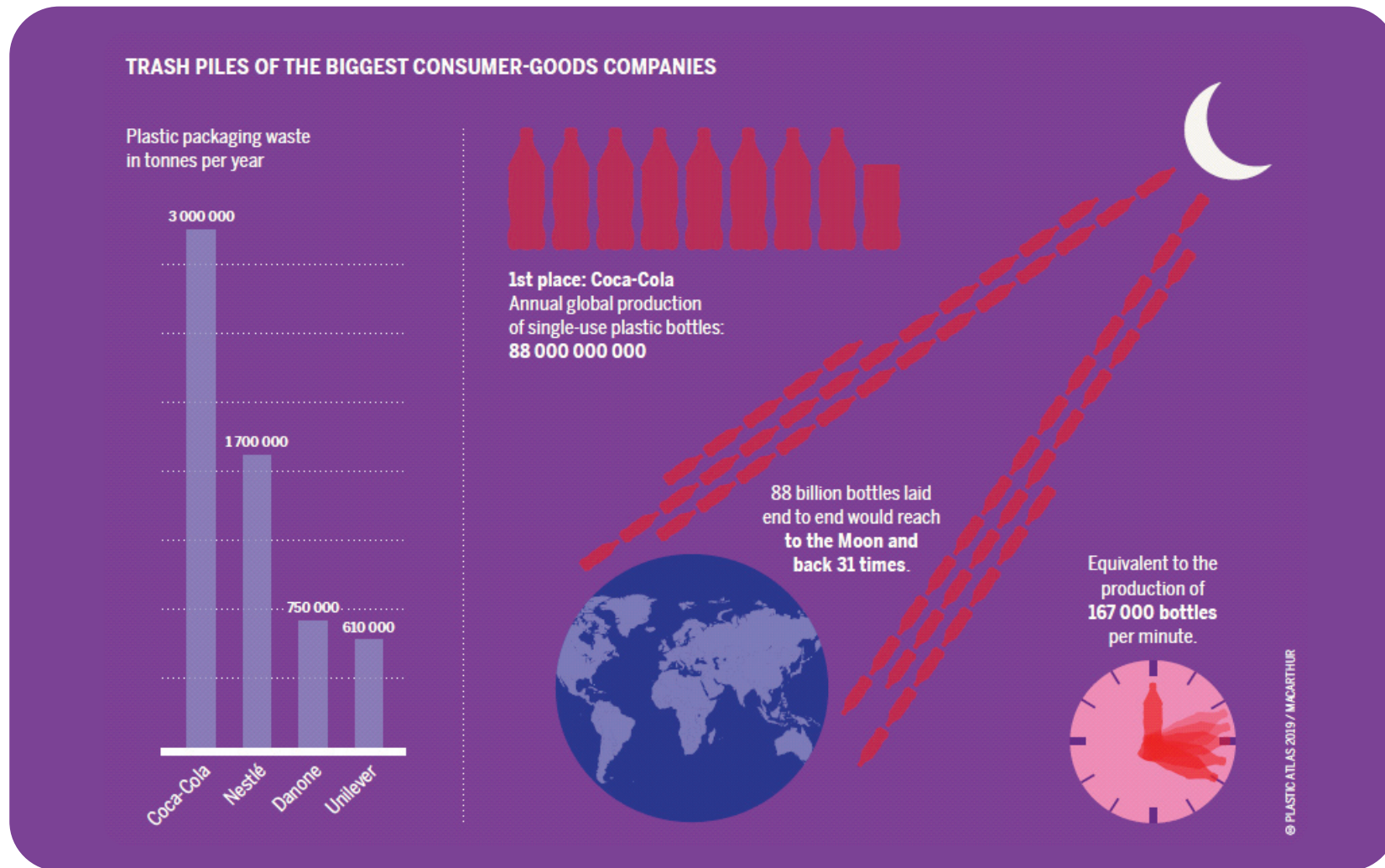


Fig 5: A world full of Plastics

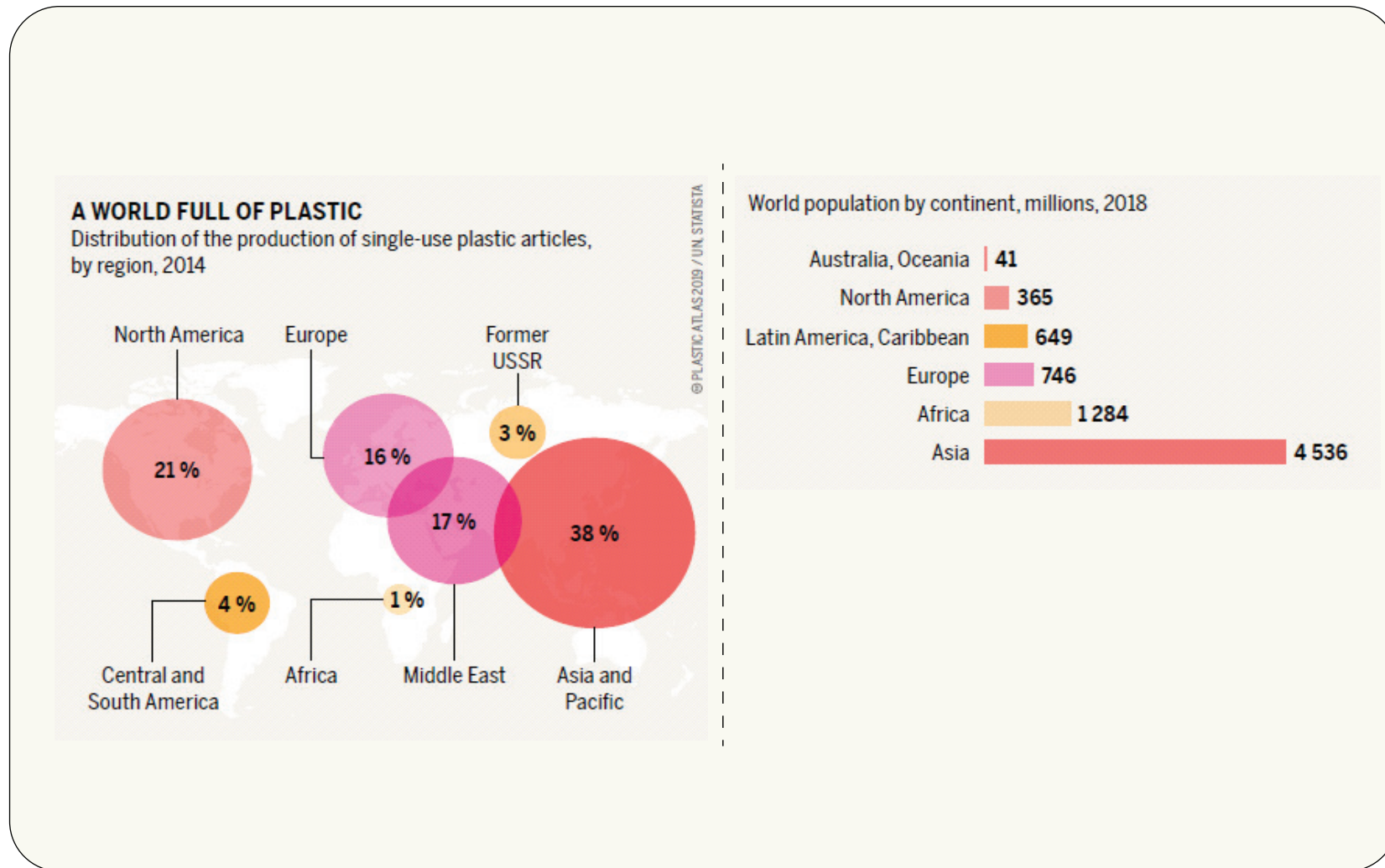
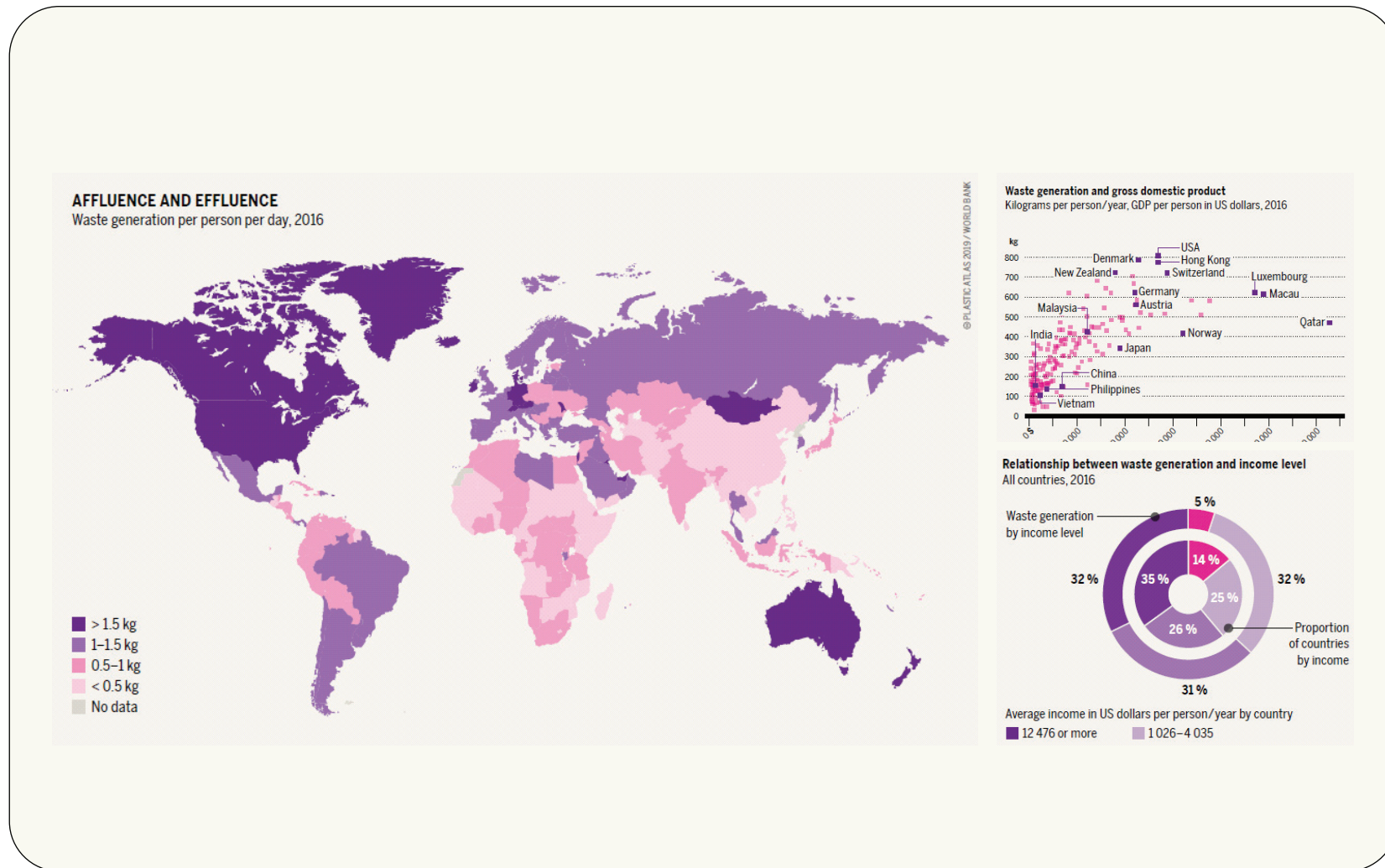


Fig 6: The link between wealth and waste

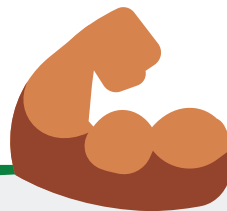


Exercises:

Let's practice!

Discuss the statistics in class:

- ? **What are your first impressions?**
- ? **Look at figures 1 and 2. Do you think there is a link between these two sets of information?**
- ? **Why is it important to understand how wealth is related to plastic use?**
- ? **Compare figures 1 and 3. Do you see any connection between where plastic is made and where it ends up floating in the sea?**
- ? **Find out about "export of waste" and discuss it in class.**



5.

Structural
level



Waste management and why it is important

Take a moment and think of the waste generated in your home every day. Where do you think it ends up? These waste disposal destinations pose a lot of problems.

Think of the extra contamination, the spread of new ailments, and depletion of the ozone layer. These problems can be addressed if waste is properly disposed and managed.

Indiscriminate disposal of plastic waste poses harm to the environment and human health (Mensah and Larbi, 2005), as explained above. You can agree that disposing of waste has a lot of impacts on the environment and on humankind.

Therefore, the proper management of the waste we generate and its eventual disposal can help to protect the environment and the health and safety of the population. It is a very important topic that needs to be addressed, and everyone should be aware of why proper waste management can be the difference between the survival of the earth and the worsening effects on the natural environment.



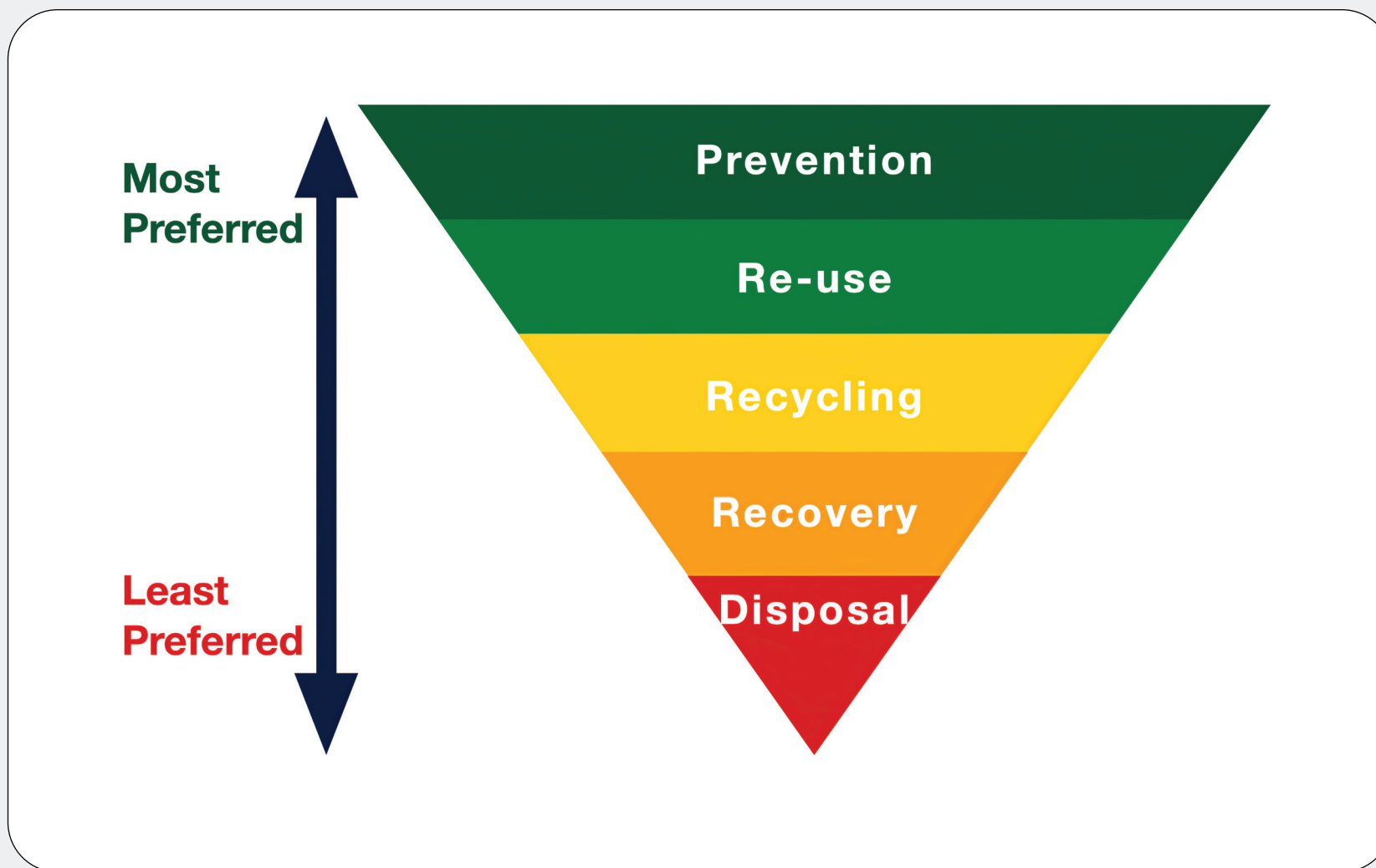
Waste collection, separation and recycling...

Waste collection means the procedure(s) of gathering solid waste for transportation from the producer to a disposal site.

Why is waste collection important?

- **Reduces Pollution:** It helps lower harmful gases like carbon monoxide (CO) and carbon dioxide (CO₂) that are bad for the air.
- **Creates Jobs:** Waste collection creates jobs for people and helps businesses grow.
- **Improves Health:** Proper waste collection helps prevent diseases like cholera and typhoid fever.
- **Raises Awareness:** When waste is collected regularly, it helps people learn more about keeping the environment clean and reducing pollution.
- **Inspires Others:** If you always have your waste collected, others will notice and might also start being more careful about their own trash. This can make people feel good about supporting your projects.

Fig 7: Waste Management Hierarchy

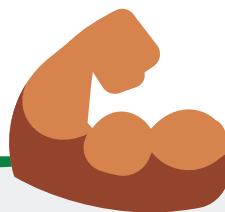


Exercises:

Let's practice!

- ? **Make a list of all the items you can find in your waste bin at home. Do this for a week and identify the common waste component generated in your home.**
- ? **List three reasons why proper waste management is important.**

- ? **Based on your understanding of waste management, differentiate between what it means to properly manage waste. Write a one-page story of what you think happens to your household waste.**



Recovery and Recycling

Resource recovery is a way of turning old or discarded items into new, useful things. These items are processed to get valuable materials and energy from them, like heat, electricity, or fuel. Recycling is when we take waste and turn it into new products. This helps us save energy and avoid using new raw materials.

By recycling, we aim to save energy, keep landfills smaller, reduce pollution, cut down on greenhouse gases, and protect natural resources for the future.

Some types of waste, like medical waste, need special care when being disposed of to avoid contamination. These can include methods like plasma gasification or turning waste into energy.



Exercises:

Let's practice!

Directions: With your group mates, listen to the questions as the teacher reads them. Then take turns in sharing your answers to the questions.

? **Where do you usually put garbage or trash at home?**

? **Do you have one or more than one garbage/trash bin at home?**

? **Do you put all garbage/trash in one bin or do you put them in separate bins at home?**

? **What do you think is the meaning of composting and communal open dumping?**





How to inspire others while creating environmental awareness

- **Collect plastic waste, separate them into various components and if possible, recycle the recyclable ones.**
- **Spread awareness.**
- **Record the steps.**
- **Post it on social media (like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram etc.).**

Down- and Upcycling

Did you know that by going a step further with just a little imagination, and perhaps a coat of paint or some hardware, our water, juice and other plastic bottles can be rescued and transformed into a new life as something unique? Yes, these wastes which we usually toss together with other waste materials into our regular trash bins causing devastating effects in our communities could be used to serve a different purpose such as a new backyard bench or a doormat in our homes.

Recycling

Recycling our consumer products reduces the amount of waste sent to our landfill sites and incinerators. Recycling plastic saves twice as much energy as burning it in an incinerator (USI, 2022). It also prevents pollution by reducing the need to collect new raw materials. Not all recycling is equal. There are two types of recycling namely; downcycling and upcycling (Weber and Dasnois, 2021).



Recycling



Downcycling



Upcycling

Downcycling

Downcycling is the recycling of waste where the recycled material is of lower quality and functionality than the original material. Downcycling is often undertaken if the nature of the material prevents it from retaining its former durability once processed or when it is uneconomical to restore the original quality. Plastic degradation leads to a reduction in circularity potential, i.e., the ability to recover the material in a closed-loop.

A common example of this process includes transforming plastic waste into doormats, carpeting, fleece etc. However, these resulting products are very rarely recyclable at all, which means that the chain is finite. We might reuse these materials once or twice, but they will not last forever, and sooner or later we will need new plastic. Although downcycling is not perfect, it is preferable to landfill or incinerators (ibid).

Upcycling

On the other hand, upcycling is the process of reusing and reimagining discarded objects or materials to create something of the same or higher quality or value than the original.

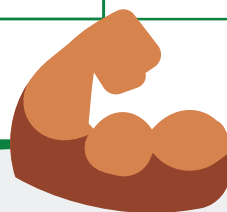
Upcycling is also known as creative reuse. The 'up' refers to the value (either artistic or environmental) and quality addition to continue the life of the object.



Exercises: Let's practice!

Think about plastics you use in your daily life. In what creative ways can you make them serve a different purpose with your normal home instruments?

Types of plastic	Materials needed	Different Purpose	Type of recycling
Cream bottle	Scissors and press studs	Wallet	Upcycling



Growing attention to social responsibilities

The Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, are a set of big plans made by 193 countries in September 2015 at the United Nations. These goals are like a roadmap to solve big problems we face, like climate change.

There are 17 main goals and 169 smaller goals that help guide us. The SDGs focus on three main areas: the economy (money and jobs), society (people and their needs), and the environment (nature and our planet). These goals are meant for everyone—governments, businesses, and all of us.

Leaders use the SDGs to make important decisions and take action, both in their own countries and around the world. Even though governments are often seen as the main players, businesses and other groups also need to be involved to reach these goals.

Relevance of SDGs in Business

A common question is how businesses can help with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their role in the 2030 Agenda. Each of the 17 goals is connected to different types of businesses. To see if a goal is important for a particular business, you need to understand what each goal and its smaller targets are about.

Knowing these goals helps a company connect its aims with the SDGs. To help with this, businesses can use a practical guide called the SDG Compass developed by the United Nations Global Compact.

This guide shows how companies can match their business plans with the SDGs and track their progress. Companies can work on areas like protecting the environment, saving water, and keeping nature balanced. Businesses in every industry can help fight climate change.

Reducing carbon emissions is something everyone can work on. Small changes in how people live and including climate-friendly ideas in business plans can make a big difference in tackling climate change and protecting our planet.



Blueprint for Business Leadership on Goal 13

The United Nations Global Compact is the biggest program in the world for helping companies be more sustainable. They have created a special plan to help businesses work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This plan includes details about how companies can make progress on Goal 13, which is about taking action on climate change. It shows what businesses can do, how Goal 13 links with other goals, and what specific targets they should aim for. There are four main actions companies can take to help achieve Goal 13:

- **Making sure they can handle climate change.**
- **Reducing operational emissions.**

- Creating products that don't produce much pollution.
- Promoting climate-conscious behaviour.

Every company should follow the guidelines from this UN plan. It should be part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) rules to help them start more sustainable practices.



6.

Action



Motivation speech: 'No take away' is also an option

Let's go back to 2019. It was my first time leaving the outskirts of Accra to visit the Garden City, Kumasi. This trip was for Recycle Up's National Waste Education Campaign Project Training, during which I would later become one of the young project interns.

Growing up, even as a young schoolboy, I had always seen the dangers (so to speak) of plastic in my environment. I remember, now with nostalgia and humor, coming back from school with a lot of complaints from my dear mother about the habit of stacking 'borla' in the sides of my school bag. I am thankful that this personal conviction of 'after use what next' or perhaps 'where will this end up' never left me. That's not to say it's been the same since my schoolboy days-has it? Eventually, I gave in to the status quo.

Even after the defining period of training and becoming a project intern for the National Waste Education Campaign, I still found difficulties in maintaining my habits regarding plastic waste.

My internship started soon after the training. I entered the project with fire and energy. Together with the young students of Achimota School we were co-creating the change we needed to see with regard to plastics, waste and our environment.

We had formal sessions, question times, debates and fun ice breaking sessions, soon enough the rather shy senior high students wanted to do more, they were truly inspired to do something. Yet, in the midst of the impact, there was a big challenge for me, it was that conviction that haunted me, it was reminding

me of my schoolboy days over again, it was emanating from inside, from the place of an altruist.

It seemed like it was only morally right. It was the fact that I, who was the one leading others to change their attitudes, preaching Refuse, Reuse, Recycle hadn't done enough of it myself. So this was the turning point, in the early part of 2020 I declared my year of 'no take away' a complete boycott of black rubber as some will call it. I started small, difficult from the beginning I must admit, I refused to take the black polythene bag that came with buying food at the store at my hostel, leaving what always looked like a grin on the shop attendants face when I said 'no black rubber'. I also decided to eat at the school canteens and restaurant rather than take away to eat in the comfort of my hostel. I avoided everything

that would require these take away, sneaking in my beautiful small black side bag where necessary. Today I am confident to say that I have significantly reduced how much plastic I take, almost eliminating its usage in my daily life - pride you can share in too soon.

The most fulfilling thing for me in this plastic story is the fact that now my roommates and friends who initially tagged me "odd", "weird" or "you think you can save Ghana" are slowly adopting the "no take away" style. Couldn't this be the biggest achievement one has achieved? At first, it seemed difficult, almost unthinkable, or however you choose to call it, but certainly not impossible.

Friends, if you would agree with me, I think we live in a society that will talk about all that happens in and around our environment but will do little in taking moral responsibility for it.

I am grateful for my personal conviction, but I am happy you are finding yours. Change starts with you. Each one of us, through our little impact, can help achieve bigger results. YES, WE CAN.

I sign off with a special quote from Angelique Kidjo to us. She says:

"We have to be bold and fearless, because what we have to lose is greater than our ego and our own interest"

"Nii Noi Kofi Omaboe- NWECC- Intern 2019"

Simply put,

if you are
FANTASTIC,
then do something
DRASTIC
to cut the
PLASTIC

#PractisePlasticFree.

We should use practical solutions to play our role as individuals.

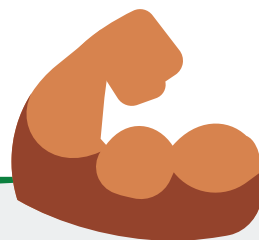
What we need is the word PLASTIC spelled out:

- P** *Try to avoid single-use plastic as much as possible.*
- L** *Many of us talk about the plastic problem but have not taken the time to stop and listen, to think deeply about whether what you are saying is consistent with what you are doing. Connect with your friends and networks to create synergy for change.*
- A** *Advocate for government policies that aim to properly manage our waste and ask companies to stop using unsustainable packaging; you can also boycott their products.*
- S** *Start a business offering solutions as the circular economy has the potential to create jobs for economic growth.*
- T** *Tell your friends, family and colleagues about the plastic problem, and teach others about what they can do to provide solutions to the plastic management issues we face.*
- I** *Influence Policy, we must participate in decision-making and policy-making at both the local and national level.*
- C** *Care more. It's not enough to talk about the plastic problem to #BeatPlasticPollution. Move a step further. Practice.*

We as individuals have the power to change our behaviour and influence social and community behaviourism towards transformative change to reduce waste-oriented demand and promote responsible consumption.

Exercises: Let's practice!

- ? Choose one letter from the word PLASTIC as described in the text and discuss how you will be taking action against plastic waste in the future.



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"Nii Noi Kofi Omaboe, Sustainability Professional, NWEK-Intern 2019"

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We also recognize the valuable contributions of our partners, sponsors, and volunteers who have provided their time, resources, and expertise. Together, we are making a significant impact in our communities and empowering the next generation of environmental ambassadors.

This handbook is a testament to the collaborative efforts and shared vision of all involved in the NWEK. We look forward to continuing this journey toward a greener future, united in our goal of creating lasting change for our environment.

Dedication

This handbook is dedicated to the passionate educators, committed students, and visionary leaders who strive to create a sustainable future.

To the young environmental ambassadors, may your curiosity and determination inspire change and foster a deep appreciation for our planet. Your commitment to learning and growing is the foundation of a brighter tomorrow.

To the educators and mentors, thank you for your unwavering dedication to empowering the next generation. Your guidance shapes minds and hearts, instilling values of responsibility and stewardship.

Together, let us champion environmental awareness and action, ensuring that our efforts today cultivate a healthier and more sustainable world for generations to come.



Empower | Innovate | Sustain

