

# CAUSES OF POOR WASTE MANAGEMENT IN LIBERIA

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## INTRODUCTION

Liberia as a country of abundant natural and mineral resources but with a tragic history of war, has experienced and is still experiencing setbacks of poverty, High Illiteracy rate, Under Development in terms of Infrastructure, Agriculture, Industrialization, Healthcare, Employment opportunities, etc, with corruption, poor Leadership and bad Governance being the leading setbacks that gave rise to all of the aforementioned setbacks. As a result, we are faced with lots of environmental and economic issues including poor waste management, that are threats to our Health and Environment. It tends to pollute our air, water, and soil. Not to mention, over spilling and leaking landfills causing infections and spreading diseases(cholera).

That is why this research article is intended to give a brief but clear, concise and precise insight on the causes, effect, and possible solutions or recommendations of poor wastes (Household, solid, organic, inorganic plastic and chemical) management in Liberia.

## DEFINITIONS

**Waste**- is an amount of material that is perceived as damaged, unsalable, a useless by-product, worthless, valueless, etc.

**Poor**- Not measuring up to normal standards.

**Management**- is the practice or process of being in charge of, directing, handling, or controlling a situation, job, a tool, machinery etc.

**Poor Waste Management-** is the lacks of proper handling of waste products from its collection to its disposal that may Lead to negative impacts on the environments and its residents.

## **CAUSES OF POOR WASTE MANAGEMENT IN LIBERIA**

we must understand that every activity produces some kind of waste. And that, there are more waste being produced everyday than they are managed. However, waste is not material but the way it is managed. For instance, a piece of paper may be termed waste depending on how it is managed. Based on this, below are some possible causes of poor waste management in Liberia.

Everyone is responsible for the causes of **poor waste management** in Liberia. This is as a result of duties negligence and irresponsibility. From the common people to the Leaders in Government who are responsible for proper Waste Management, we all are held reliable. Moving forward, there are other major causes of poor waste management in Liberia. They are as follows;

- ✓ **Everyone**
- ✓ **Lack of Public Awareness**
- ✓ **Over Production of waste**
- ✓ **Absence of or Improper waste Collection**
- ✓ **Urbanization and population Increase**
- ✓ **Improper Waste Disposal**
- ✓ **Improper waste Sorting or segregation(mixing)**
- ✓ **Overproduction and excess importation of Low standard goods and non-recyclables**
- ✓ **Insufficient investment in waste management**
- ✓ **Mismanagement of waste disposal and mishandling of funds**
- ✓ **Lack of proper machinery or tools**

**EVERYONE-** We all produce more wastes than we can manage. Some more than others. Like in factories and industries producing more wastes than households and illegally dumping them in landfills or streams and rivers. Also, some Liberians will see trash cans but deliberately throw dirt out their windows or on the streets. Worst of all, our cities and streets have turned to dumpsites because Government Officials (the Mayor and his commission) have neglected their duties to employ citizens to come and collect the dirt/wastes to carry them for proper disposals. Even the ones that have already been disposed at dumb sites are making mountains because there's nowhere to take them for recycling or processing. We're all at fault.

**LACK OF PUBLIC AWARENESS-** the vast majority of Liberians are Illiterate and hence lack knowledge of properly managing their household wastes and how detrimental to their health and the environment it is to dump wastes in the ocean, bury or burn it anyhow. That's why they go about doing it carelessly.

**OVER PRODUCTION OF WASTES-** Liberians desires for a comfortable life has made our demand for products more. That is why we purchase and use more materials than we need. As a result, the more products we use, the more wastes are produced. Some Liberians don't even use the same materials or clothes twice nor do they eat leftover foods. They call the used materials trash and the leftovers spoiled.

**ABSENCE OF OR IMPROPER WASTES DISPOSAL-** this is seen every day in our various communities in Liberia. Citizens will gather their wastes at the market places, their homes, other businesses but no one will come to collect them. As a result, they will call and pay the Zokos(street thugs that are addicts) to come collect their wastes before it starts developing bad odors. These Zokos will then collect the wastes unprotected, with no working tools or gears, only to end up disposing them in drainages, the river or ocean-like in west point and new Kru-town, and most times in the middle of the main streets-like Red light market, Duala Market, and Water side market.

**URBANIZATION AND POPULATION INCREASE-** Day by day citizens are relocating from the hinterlands to the cities for greener pastures and many other reasons. Their presence in the various cities of Liberia increase the population densities of those cities. Hence, the more products are being used and the more wastes are being produced on a daily basis.

**IMPROPER WASTE DISPOSAL-** as was mentioned before, citizens ignorance of the knowledge of proper wastes disposal, and the absence of an efficient recycling plant or system to come collect the wastes to be disposed of properly, have citizens dumbing their wastes in streams, rivers, the oceans etc, placing them in self-made landfills or burning them anyhow if they start to occupy space or produce unpleasant odors.

**IMPROPER WASTES SORTING AND SEGREGATION-** Due to ignorance on the part of the vast majority, and the absence of an efficient recycling processing plants or systems in Liberia, the wastes are all combined and disposed. Most citizens are not aware that household wastes are to be separated from plastics and other recyclable wastes to avoid the development of toxins and bad odors as the combined wastes start to decay.

**OVER PRODUCTION AND EXCESS IMPORTATION OF LOW STANDARD GOODS AND NONRECYCLABLES-**factories and companies that are over producing nonrecyclable goods of low standards and local merchants that import goods of the same variety all in the name of enriching themselves though satisfying our desires, are causing us more harm than good. This is why our coastlines and streets are currently overflowing with recyclable and nonrecyclable bottles and other items.

**INSUFFICIENT INVESTMENT IN WASTE MANAGEMENT AND MISANAGEMENT OF FUNDS-** Wastes Management is one of the sectors in Liberia that not many people is willing to invest in but that is paramount to our wellbeing. In the minds of our city mayors and city/town

commissions, it will sort itself out while embezzling public funds. Unfortunately, what they perceive as minor is slowly swallowing our streets, beaches and communities. They have broken the wastes management system and currently have non-existence.

**LACK OF PROPER WORKFORCE, MACHINERY OR TOOLS-** Our streets, communities and beaches are piled up with wastes of all sorts (mainly household and plastics) because there are no employed cleaners to go work, no materials, no dump bins for disposals, no truck to transport to recycling plants if there's any. If NGOs, youth movements and community dwellers try to help minimize the wastes, it's like going in circle and not getting anything done since there's nowhere suitable for disposal and no one is coming to take it away after disposal.

### **EFFECTS OF POOR WASTE MANAGEMENT IN LIBERIA**

The effects of poor waste management are what Liberians are experiencing now. Nowadays we see solid, plastic and organic wastes littered all over the streets of the city and even in our communities that are affecting us greatly. Below are some major effects Liberians are experiencing:

- **Soil contamination**
- **Air contamination**
- **Water contamination**
- **Bad Impacts on Humans Health**
- **Impacts on Animals and Marine Life**
- **Disease-carrying pests**
- **Adversely affects the local Economy**
- **Missed recycling opportunities**
- **Causes extreme Climate Changes**
- **It is slowly killing our environment and contributing to the slow dying of our planet**

**SOIL CONTAMINATION-** this is one major problem Liberians are currently faced with but majority are unaware due to ignorance. Soil contamination does not only affect plants growth, it is also unhealthy for animals and humans feeding on those plants. By combining all our wastes (metals, chemicals, plastics, metals, paper, and electronics) and burying them or dumping them improperly in landfills, we're endangering ourselves. Because, as they start to decay, they excrete hazardous chemicals that leak into the soil like when plastics release DEHA, a carcinogen that affects our reproductive systems, causing liver dysfunction and weight loss. This is why sometimes we buy our fruits and vegetables from the market or harvest them we sometimes notice them having unusual colorings and tasting unpleasant(bitter).

**AIR CONTAMINATION**-besides the air having bad odor, wastes as containers, plastics, paper and clothes having bleach and acids that are burned emits methane gas, dioxins, and Co2. These emitted gases and chemicals are dangerous for the ozone layer in the atmosphere our respiratory and reproductive systems. This is why nowadays we have some Liberians experiencing womb, lungs and prostate cancer while the rest of us are experiencing the intense burn of the sun's ray.

**WATER CONTAINATION**- Hazardous wastes leech into the ground from landfills or burial and seep into groundwater entering wells, streams, lakes and rivers. Once there, it contaminates and suffocates marine coral reefs and the fishes. We citizen then become unknowingly affected when we eat those marine animals or drink the water.

Various forms of pollution



**BAD IMPACT ON HEALTH**-this applies to wastes disposal workers and other recycling processing plants. Exposure to improperly handled wastes can cause skin irritations, blood infections, respiratory problems, growth problems and even reproductive issues.

**IMPACT ON ANIMALS OR MARINE LIFE**- plastics wastes, chemicals, Styrofoam and cigarette butts suffocates marine animals and kill them when they consume them. Also, cattle and other animals who graze near landfills and dump sites contaminated by toxins are at risks of being poisoned by the toxins seeping into the soil.

**DISEASE CARRYING-PEST** -Rats and Mosquitoes that feeds at these sewage leaks and wastes sites are prone to carrying life-threatening diseases. Mosquitoes are carrier for the Dengue fever and Malaria. And, rats are carriers of leptospirosis and salmonellosis. Also, roaches are carrier the bacteria serovar that brings the typhoid fever. When they enter our homes and get in contact with us/our foods, we're doomed.

**ADVERSELY AFFECTS THE LOCAL ECONOMY**- poor waste management system in Liberia has left a lot of common people without cleaning, wastes disposal, drivers and supervisor jobs. Also, everyone wants to stay and live in a clean, fresh, and sanitary place. This is one of the many reasons Liberia lacks tourist's attraction and is a huge turn off to prominent investors.

**MISSED RECYCLING OPPORTUNITIES**- Liberia with zero wastes management scheme is missing out on the huge revenue that recycling brings to an economy that boosts it. Also, we are missing out on the resources that can be reused and the employment opportunity a recycling

Centre can bring. This is why, when YUGNET-Liberia worked with Firestone at their recycling Centre, though for a short time, it is a dream come true.

**CAUSES EXTREME CLIMATE CHANGES** - decomposing wastes emits greenhouse gases that rise to the atmosphere and traps heat on the earth. These greenhouse gases are the major culprits behind the extreme weather changes in Liberia and other countries around the world are experiencing. From heavy storms and rain, flooding, erosion, forest fires outbreaks to smothering heat, it's all because of these greenhouse gases.



Flooding in various regions of the country

**IT IS SLOWLY KILLING THE PLANET**- there is a saying that says “you never know the importance of something until you lose it” which is very true. But, we urge us all to not let this saying be true for our country and planet. Because losing both means being homeless and the human race being extinct. We only have one true country, one planet, and our careless handling of waste is harming it. therefore, it is our responsibility to restore what we have damaged.



Harmful algae bloom and marine debris that are life threatening to marine species.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS OR RECOMMENDATIONS

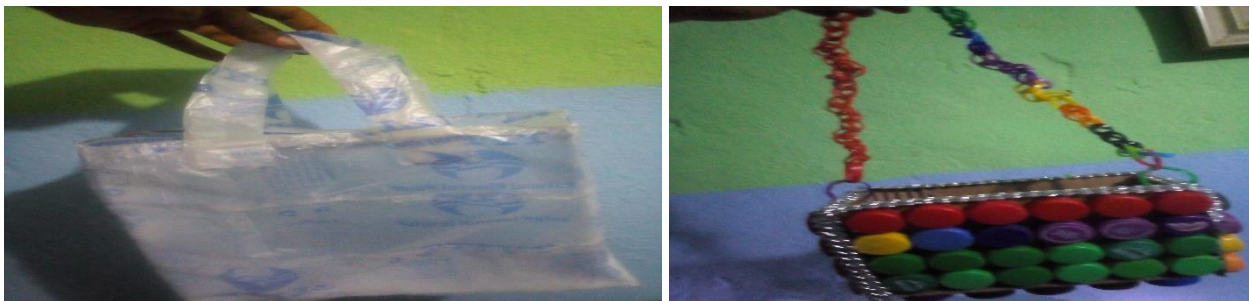
we cannot totally get rid of wastes all together because we produce them every day from the products we need and use. That is why we must manage them well. Below are possible recommendations or solutions to properly manage our wastes:

**REDUCE**- resources are scarce and the population is increasing every day. Hence, it is important that every citizen minimize the number of products they use in order to make less

waste in the first place. That is, reduce the use of harmful, wasteful, and non-recyclable products. Example: plastics.

**REUSE-** This has to do with maintenance or utilizing the little we have, or have use. Many people throw away things they have used without finding an alternative use for that material. That is using again and again by firstly cleaning and then reused. Like, patching and redesigning worn and torn clothes, using left over cans as flower pots and other decorations. Some of these reusable materials do not decompose easily. For instance, materials made from rubber.

**RECYCLE-** Recycling is like repurposing our waste. That is finding the same or another mode or means to use them again. Like, collecting glass and plastic wastes to be processed into new plastics and glass materials to minimize the over piling of plastic and glass wastes that are contaminating our soils and waters.



Plastic and rubber bottle caps recycled as fashionable bags of economic value

- Also, Government Officials, institutions, organizations and community leaders that are responsible for proper wastes collection, disposal and recycling should be held accountable and punished for not doing their jobs well. Those embezzling waste management funds should be held accountable and to make a refund.
- **Public Awareness and trainings** on wastes segregation, collection, disposal, removal and recycling through social media, radio broadcasting, campaign march, and face to face in person community outreach.
- Establishing an efficient waste management Centre or system that involves proper collection, disposal and recycling to bring revenue and employment opportunities.
- Stop Improper Landfill Disposal.
- **Youth Empowerment** – Government Officials, Affluent citizens or community dwellers, private entities, NGOs etc. with the funding and necessary supports, should follow **ActionAid Liberia, Global Platforms, YUGNET-Liberia** etc., examples and establish foundations and initiatives that empowers young people to be proactive, creative and innovative when it comes to handling/tackling the waste management issue in our country. Or better still, finance and render these supports to existing youth-led initiatives.



**YUGNET-Liberia, a youth-led organization offering capacity-building training & implementing communication outreach.**

- We all must participate in cleaning our environment, starting in our homes to the communities and properly manage our wastes in order to save ourselves, our children and leave our country and this planet better than we met it for them.

## **CONCLUSION**

- Conclusively, poor wastes management is hazardous to our health and environment. And, we all are responsible. This is why all hands are needed on deck to solve this problem through public awareness, proper collection and disposal and the establishment of an efficient wastes recycling processing plant/Centre.

By doing all of these, we get to have a proper wastes management channel that will be contributing to the sustainability of our environment, improving our health, providing job opportunities for the common people that will in turn reduce the poverty and unemployment strain on the economy thereby promoting and implementing the UN 17 SDGs.

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