

Addressing issues of Global Citizenship

WASTE

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Waste

-time to move mountains-

Each year the UK produces 400 million tonnes of waste and household waste is growing by 3% per year.

Virtually everything we use creates varying degrees of waste throughout its lifecycle. There is waste associated with the extraction, harvesting, manufacture or transport of materials, waste associated with using a product, e.g. a car using oil, or a toy using batteries, and finally the negative impacts of waste disposal.

The extraction of resources often impacts negatively upon Southern countries through mining or logging for example. Yet the people of Southern countries themselves are often the least wasteful.

Our increased wealth and prosperity have come at a price. We have built mountains of waste in the North and left scarred environments and societies in the South.

4 R's for managing our waste

Most household waste in the UK ends up in landfill sites, rotting down to produce methane - a powerful 'greenhouse gas' - and poisonous liquids. As spaces for landfill sites run out, an increasing amount of our waste is incinerated. Burning waste can produce health-harming emissions and only reduces the weight of the waste by two thirds. The toxic ash left behind must be got rid of - usually it is landfilled.

So, step up recycling?

Recycling reduces pollution, saves energy and reduces costs while slowing down the rate at which non-renewable resources are depleted. The UK currently recycles only 8% of all household waste. The Government has targets to recycle or compost 25% of household waste by 2005. Switzerland meanwhile has already achieved 52%.

Recycling saves resources. One tonne of recycled newsprint is equivalent to almost a dozen trees. Globally, only 25% of newsprint is recycled, yet recycling half of the world's paper would meet over 70% of global demand for new paper and save 8 million hectares of forest. Recycling saves energy. It requires 20-25 times more energy to make aluminium by smelting bauxite than it does to melt and produce 'new' aluminium from scrap. Recycling also creates jobs. At least 30,000 people are involved in recycling aluminium in the US; twice the number employed in primary aluminium production.

Yet, despite the obvious benefits, recycling is in fact the lowest priority in the '4 Rs' waste minimisation hierarchy. The most important priority is to **reduce** the amount of waste we create in the first place. Next comes **re-use**, followed by **repair** and finally **recycling**.

The South - already there

Rarely acknowledged is the fact that countries in the South create some of the lowest levels of waste. This is because thousands of poor people earn a living by collecting materials dumped at public waste-disposal sites or in the streets for turning into something useful. Resources also tend to be reused and repaired to a much greater extent. Malawi for example, like many poor African countries, still operates a return/refund/refill scheme on bottled drinks while Cuba is famous for keeping its ancient fleet of American cars running. Most significantly Southern countries tend to produce much less waste in the first place and use considerably less energy. Mexico produces just

EXERCISING RIGHTS, AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY: THE WORLD OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Global citizenship education identifies key areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes which foster concern for social justice and the environment.

It helps develop critical thinking skills and enables these to be applied to complex and controversial issues.

A Global Citizen is someone who:

- has an understanding of how the world works economically, politically, socially, culturally, technologically and environmentally*
- understands the links between their own lives and those of people throughout the world*
- is outraged by social injustice*
- participates in and contributes to the community at a range of levels from the local to the global*
- is willing to act to make the world a more equitable and sustainable place*

(based on Oxfam Curriculum for Global Citizenship)

One of a series of leaflets exploring important global citizenship issues through numeracy and literacy