

TEDXDAVANGERE 2026



India can't recycle its way out of **plastic**

But it can build its way out



Every year, another campaign.

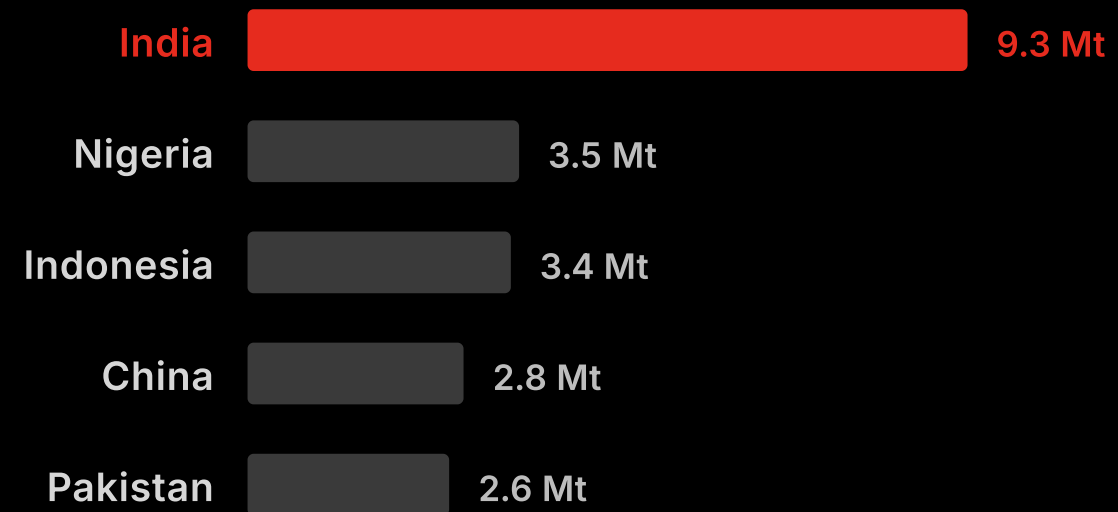
An aerial photograph of a sprawling landfill filled with plastic waste. The landscape is covered in a thick layer of discarded plastic, with various colors like white, blue, and yellow visible. Several yellow construction vehicles, including bulldozers and a truck, are operating on the waste. Plumes of white smoke or steam are rising from different points across the landfill. In the far background, a city skyline is visible under a hazy, overcast sky.

Every year, more plastic.

**Either we are careless.
Or we have been solving
the wrong problem.**

#1

India — the world's
largest contributor to
plastic pollution



Plastic entering the environment, million tonnes a year · University of Leeds, Nature 2024

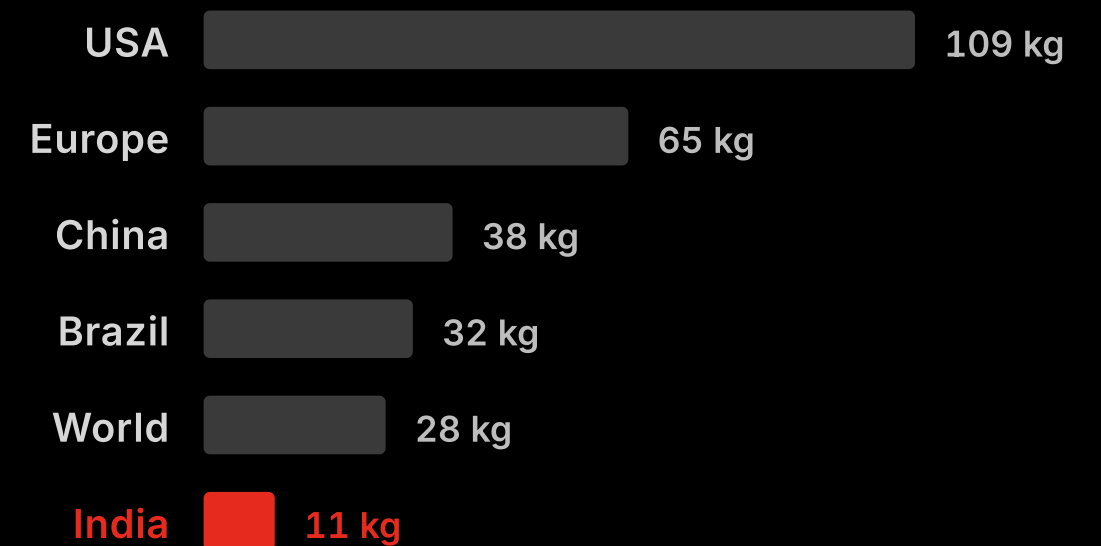
9.3M

tonnes a year —
roughly **one-fifth** of all
the plastic pollution on
Earth



Not because of what we **consume**.

Per person, Indians use relatively little plastic.



Plastic consumed per person, kg a year · PlastIndia Foundation / FICCI



Because of what we **lose.**



Burned

Smoke that causes cancer



Blocked

Drains choke. Streets flood.



Eaten

Cows. Turtles. Fish.



Inside us

Found in human blood

Uncollected plastic does not go away.
It just goes somewhere worse.

3.9M
INDIA'S OFFICIAL FIGURE

AGAINST

9.3M

WHAT RESEARCHERS MEASURED

Official



3.9 Mt

Measured



5.4 Mt never counted

Million tonnes a year · CPCB estimate against the Leeds measurement

**Five million tonnes
that officially
does not exist.**

**India does not have a plastic
~~consumption~~ problem.**

**India has a plastic
collection problem.**



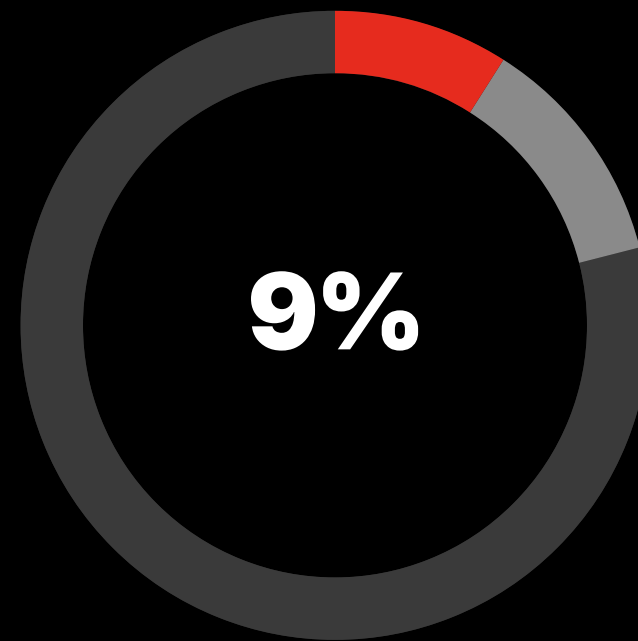
**The last time you took a plastic bag —
you didn't want it.**

**There was simply
nothing else within reach.**

That is not a failure of your values. It is a gap in the system.

9%

of all the plastic ever
made has been
recycled



■ **9%**
recycled

■ **12%**
incinerated

■ **79%** landfill

or the
environment

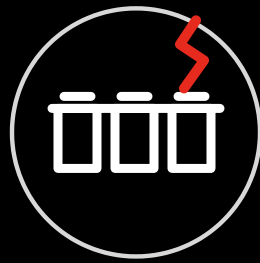
Of all plastic ever made ·
Geyer et al., Science
Advances 2017

**Recycling was never a plan.
It was a hope.**

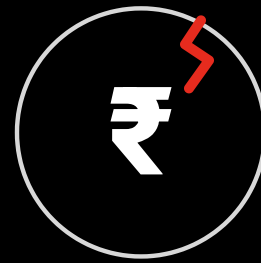
The chain breaks in **four** places.



COLLECTION



SEGREGATION



INCENTIVES



THE ALTERNATIVE



01 Collection

In vast parts of this country, nobody comes.
The waste simply stays where it lands.

02

Segregation

Mixed waste is uneconomic to recycle. Mixing is a one-way door.



The background image shows a recycling facility. In the foreground, a wooden table holds a calculator, several stacks of metal coins, and an open ledger. A large metal weighing scale hangs from a chain. In the background, there are large bales of compressed plastic waste, some white and some multi-colored, stacked on pallets. The scene is dimly lit, with a dark overlay.

03 Incentives

Almost nobody in the chain is paid to do the right thing at the moment it matters.



04

The alternative, at the moment of need

The gap between intending to refuse plastic
and having something else to reach for.

**An engineering problem
wearing the **costume**
of a moral one.**



**Awareness doesn't put a bag
in your hand. This does.**



Carries wet fish.
Then **composts**.





Same street. Same round.
Still taking waste.



Nobody reported this.
The camera did.

100

AGAINST

TONNES DISPLACED

9,300,000

TONNES A YEAR

100 tonnes · 0.001%



9.3 million tonnes, every year

That distance is
not a tragedy.
It is a **vacancy**.

built so far



still to be built

**India doesn't need
a billion people to be
slightly **more careful.****



It needs a **few thousand**
to build what
doesn't exist yet.

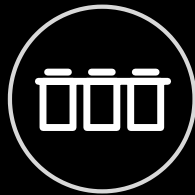


You cannot recycle your way
out of a systems problem.
But you can **build** your way out.

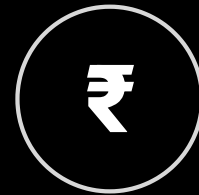
COLLECTION



SEGREGATION



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SOMEBODY IN THIS ROOM