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# The Island



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- HOME
- NEWS
- FEATURES
- SPORTS
- BUSINESS
- OPINION
- EDITORIAL
- FASHION
- POLITICS
- CLASSIFIEDS
- ARCHIVES
- CONTACT U

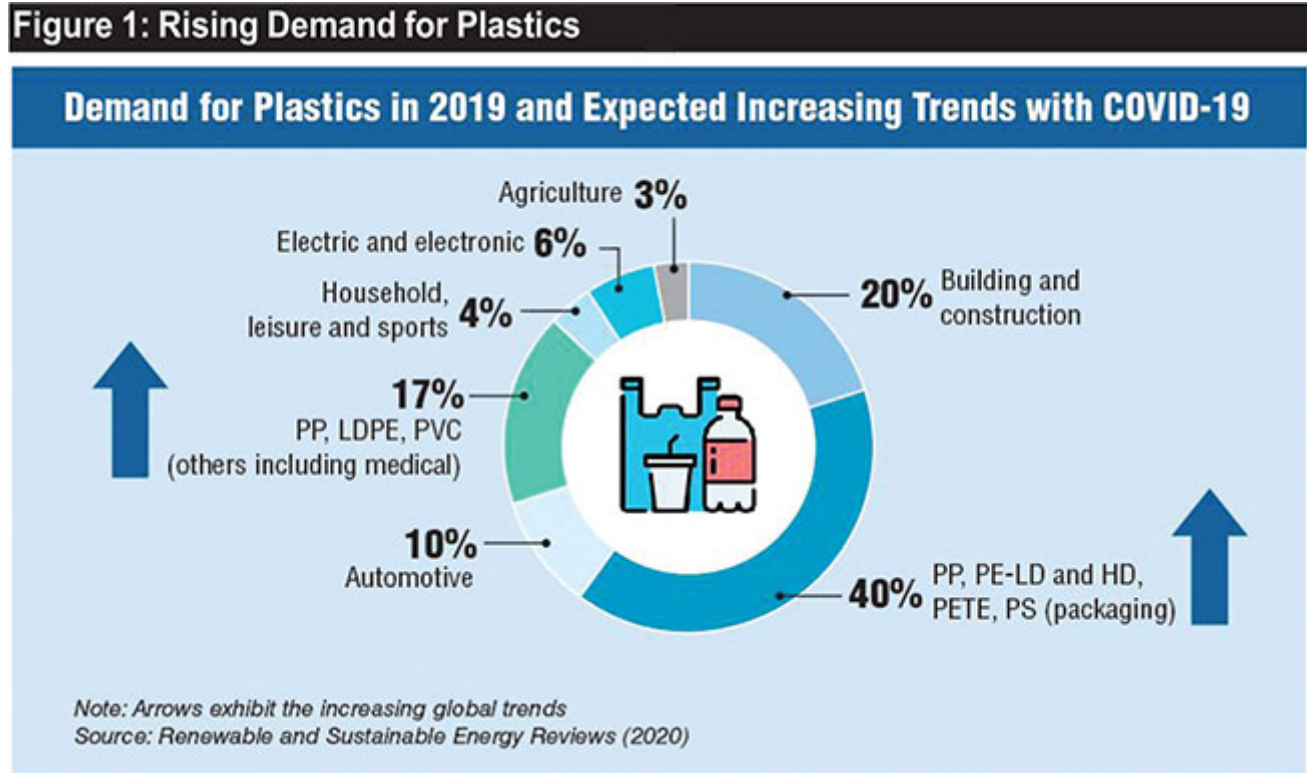
## BUSINESS

# Plastic Pandemic: The ecological fallout of COVID-19 and policy options for Sri Lanka

Published 1 month ago on 2021/12/8



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**Towards a f Islamism –**



by Ruwan Samaraweera



The lockdowns introduced in 2020 to curb the spread of COVID-19 saw the narrative “nature is healing” gain prominence. However, the notion that nature, in the absence of people, was healing fizzled out fairly quickly with the emergence of fresh environmental challenges, most notably, the resurgence of single-use plastics. In fact, in the months following the lockdowns, reliance on plastics grew exponentially, with the scale of the negative environmental impacts far outweighing initial gains such as reduced air and noise pollution. This blog examines the ecological fallout of the pandemic and suggests policy options for Sri Lanka to avert the looming environmental disaster.



## The Plastic Pandemic



Plastics have several applications and offer undeniable benefits to consumers and producers due to specific, inherent properties. They are hygienic, lightweight, flexible and anti-corrosive. As such, plastics are among the most extensively-produced material globally with 359 million tonnes of plastics produced in 2018 alone. However, plastics have become a severe environmental concern due to haphazard disposal. Plastics include consumables like plastic bags, straws, cups, bottles etc., which are thrown away after being used just once, referred to as single-use plastics. Worldwide consumption of plastic bags ranges from 1 to 5 trillion annually, and almost 160,000 plastic bags are consumed per second globally.

Without even being a large consumer of plastics globally, Sri Lanka generates more than 5 million kilograms of plastic waste per day, where the per capita daily contribution is nearly 0.5 kg. Sri Lanka is already struggling to cope with the amount of plastic waste generated each year. Unless concrete measures are taken to alter the current manufacturing methods and consumption patterns of plastics, the situation could result in irreversible damage to the environment. The global threat of the COVID-19 pandemic makes the problem (ex: Styrofoam, aluminium cans, polystyrene etc.) even more challenging.

### An Ugly Resurgence

The demand for plastic by medical and packaging sectors is increasing sharply compared to pre-pandemic conditions (Figure 1). For instance, an estimated 89 million medical masks, 76 million gloves and 1.6 million goggles are required monthly in the battle against the

pandemic, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). As a result, researchers expect a 53.4% market growth for disposable facemasks over 2020-2027. The disposable facemasks are produced using polymers such as polypropylene (PP), polyurethane, polyacrylonitrile, polystyrene, polycarbonate, polyethylene (LDPE), or polyester, which are potential sources of microplastics.

Estimates illustrate that the demand for disposable syringes and plastic containers that store vaccines will be increased with nationwide vaccination efforts against COVID-19. As a result, the global market will experience a 7% compound annual growth rate and reach a value of USD 14.4 billion by 2030. Moreover, the demand for other personal protective equipment like face shields made from PP, LDPE gowns, vinyl gloves made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC) will increase sharply along with the plastic packaging material. Thus, the production and consumption of PP, LDPE and PVC material will exhibit an increasing trend.

Lockdowns and resulting online shopping and home delivery can escalate the demand for plastic, which is reflected by the accumulation of plastic wastes, especially from food packaging. In Thailand, plastic waste rose by 15% during the pandemic, primarily due to food packaging waste, resulting from tripled food delivery demand. During the pandemic, many governments worldwide banned the use of reusable cups and food utensils due to safety reasons since reusable commodities could be contagious. Scholars also predict a drastic increase in medical waste that includes single-use plastic and other environmentally problematic material.

For instance, in Hubei province, China, medical waste generation increased sharply, and by 9 March 2020, the country collected 468.9 tonnes of medical waste related to the pandemic. A more significant proportion of that waste is comprised of single-use plastics. Wuhan's medical waste exceeded the maximum incineration capacity of 46 tonnes/day due to a dramatic rise in

waste accumulation up to 240 tonnes/day. Hence, despite their detrimental impacts, managing the pandemic is linked with single-use plastics and other environmentally-harmful material.



Addressing environmental, economic, health, and socio-cultural issues related to single-use plastics and other damaging material requires identifying the most problematic single-use plastic and other material, evaluating the scale of the problem, identifying significant sources of pollution and potential impacts of mismanagement on the environment, human and animal health, and the economy. Various methods can reduce the harmful effects of single-use plastics and other environmentally problematic materials. However, the availability of alternatives is crucial to cut down the use effectively.

### **Voluntary reduction strategies**

One of the key instruments for single-use plastic is voluntary reduction strategies. Those are based on consumption patterns, consumer and producer choices upon an increased understanding.

### **Awareness creation**

Voluntary adjustments are facilitated by awareness creation among stakeholder groups which are a gradual and transformational process that changes consumer and producer behaviour.

### **Policy instruments**

Policy instruments can be classified as regulatory and economic (market-based and a combination of regulatory and financial) instruments.

The principal legislation governing plastic pollution in Sri Lanka is the National Environmental Act No 47 of 1980, where Section 32 comprises the manufacture, sale and use of plastic and polythene. As previously mentioned, several amendments were made to the act to address the challenges in managing plastic waste. Lobbying from local industry and

pressures from major exporting countries, and availability of alternatives remain significant challenges in implementing bans. However, as discussed earlier, single-use plastics have the lowest recyclability and highest disposable rates. Therefore, implementing a combined approach of levies, bans, and extended producer responsibility (EPR) wherever necessary would enhance the positive impacts.

Link to blog: <https://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2021/12/07/plastic-pandemic-the-ecological-fallout-of-covid-19-and-policy-options-for-sri-lanka/>

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**BUSINESS**

# EY powered rapid transformation at English Tea Shop Organic using a comprehensive ESOP model

Published 10 hours ago on 2022/01/7



‘English Tea Shop Organic’ (ETS) brand of Amazon Trading Ltd., established in 2010, has been on a truly transformative journey since implementing a company-wide open book management program in 2015. This was followed by a unique Employee Share Option Plan (ESOP) embarked in 2019 to help build a ‘significantly employee-owned organization’.

The ESOP’s Phase 1 in 2019 saw the company granting 15% of the equity stake to employees. ETS just announced the launch of the second phase of the ESOP, increasing the shares allocated to employees up to 30%, thus accelerating the journey of making the company a significantly employee-owned business. Moving towards this model is already paying rich dividends along with an array of benefits for its eligible employees, with the company successfully withstanding the impact of Covid-19, showing solid resilience and rapid growth.

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**BUSINESS**

# Microsoft Sri Lanka announces 2021 Partner of the Year Awards winners

Published 10 hours ago on 2022/01/7



COLOMBO, Sri Lanka: Microsoft Sri Lanka has announced the winners of the 2021 Partner of the Year Awards. The annual awards recognize Microsoft partners demonstrating excellence in innovation and implementation of customer solutions based on Microsoft technology.

Award winners and finalists from the region were recognized at the all-digital Microsoft SEA New Markets Inspire held on December 7-8, 2021. This year, Microsoft acknowledged partners in multiple categories celebrating each of the solution areas, industries, and sectors in which Microsoft technologies are used.

“We’re thrilled to celebrate the winners of this year’s Microsoft Sri Lanka Partner of the Year Awards,” said Harsha Randeny, Country Manager, Microsoft Sri Lanka & Maldives. “These

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## BUSINESS

# Expolanka Holdings partners Sarvodaya to launch ‘Sabrina Yusoof Women’s Empowerment Initiative’

Published 10 hours ago on 2022/01/7



In an effort to facilitate opportunities for Sri Lankan female-led entrepreneurship, globally diversified conglomerate Expolanka partnered with Sarvodaya to launch the ‘Sabrina Yusoof Women’s Empowerment Initiative.

The project primarily aims to fund low-income female entrepreneurs to establish and enhance their own business ventures, enabling more Sri Lankan women to gain financial independence, by generating their own stable, sustainable incomes.

The initiative will aim to offer selected MSMEs in the Colombo district with access to a grant in order to empower their businesses, and help them adapt to the emerging ‘new normal’. A total of Rs. 24 million has been allocated for the project.

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