

Sustainable Future for Hot Food Delivery in Bangladesh

A H M Masum Billah

The hot food delivery sector in Bangladesh has undergone an unprecedented surge in growth in recent years, expanding from major cities to reach every corner of the country. This surge is intricately linked to the flourishing economy and simultaneous growth of the restaurant sector. The allure of varied cuisines delivered conveniently with a few taps on a smartphone has captured city dwellers, fueling growth in the packaging sector.

However, the widespread use of plastic in hot food delivery packaging, notably polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP), presents serious environmental problems. Chosen for its lightweight, durable, and cost-effective properties, plastic has become the preferred material. Nevertheless, the extensive utilization of plastic packaging has sparked significant environmental concerns in Bangladesh, reflecting global anxieties surrounding plastic pollution. This worrying trend makes it even more important for the industry to rethink its methods and switch to more environmentally friendly options for a healthier and more balanced future.

Plastic pollution is a widespread and difficult problem, leaving rivers and streets full of unsolicited plastic trash. Single-use plastics, often used for packaging hot food for delivery, contribute to long-lasting pollution as they take hundreds of years to break down. Microplastics infiltrate the food chain, posing health risks to both people and animals. This alarming reality emphasizes the urgent need for the hot food delivery business to make a substantial change to more environmentally friendly packaging options immediately. This shift will help reduce the harmful effects of plastic pollution on health and the environment.

According to the UN Environment Program (UNEP), the destruction of the environment is a major global problem, and plastic pollution exacerbates this issue. The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the use of plastic, with an unusual rise in consumption as disposable items, considered safer, became more popular. This increased use of single-use plastics is a significant contributor to the global problem of plastic waste.

New information from a study by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration highlights an alarming fact: plastic bags used for tea, coffee, juice, or any other soft drinks can persist for up to 50 years. Given its long-lasting nature, it's imperative for the packaging industry, especially in the rapidly growing hot food service business, to switch to greener alternatives. As this business expands and more plastic is used, it's not only a good idea but a necessity to consider the long-term effects of plastic trash.

A significant portion of plastic pollution can be attributed to the youth, particularly those aged 15 to 35 years, who represent the primary consumer base for foods delivered in plastic packaging. This accentuates the need for targeted awareness and education initiatives to foster a shift in consumer behavior. Initiatives that raise awareness about the environmental repercussions of plastic packaging and promote the adoption of sustainable alternatives will be instrumental in steering this influential demographic towards more eco-conscious practices. Cultivating a generation that prioritizes environmental stewardship and actively participates in mitigating the long-term impact of plastic waste is crucial.

This age group constitutes the main consumers of food served in plastic containers, underscoring the importance of targeted education and awareness programs. A study by the Environment and Social Development Organization found that 87,000 tonnes of single-use plastics, including plastic bags, bottles, cups, plates, and straws, are discarded annually in Bangladesh.

To address the issue at its roots, fostering a shift in consumer behavior through informed choices is paramount. Initiatives that make people more aware of how plastic packaging harms the environment and encourage the use of eco-friendly choices will play a significant role in getting this important group of people to adopt more eco-friendly habits. A comprehensive plan is needed, including campaigns to teach people how to properly dispose of trash, strict rules to prevent improper disposal of plastics, investments in new technologies for managing trash, and incentives for businesses to switch to eco-friendly packaging.

People working in the hot food service business need to collaborate to find and use eco-friendly materials that break down faster than regular plastics. For this significant change to happen, recyclable and biodegradable materials like cardboard, bagasse (sugarcane fiber), and polylactic acid (PLA) should be prioritized.

The industry's move to sustainable methods will only work if everyone collaborates to use these eco-friendly alternatives. This proactive approach is necessary to lessen the effects of plastic pollution and set the stage for a future that cares more about the environment.

Another solution is to encourage people to use containers that can be used more than once. Establishing a system where customers can return empty containers for cleaning and reutilization reduces waste and encourages a more environmentally friendly way of serving hot food.

Bangladesh's government has taken action to stop plastic waste by making people less likely to use single-use plastics. It is the Department of Environment's (DoE) big goal to cut plastic use by half and get rid of all single-use plastics by 2030 by putting the Solid Waste Management Act 2021 into effect. The framework of these laws is an important step toward protecting the earth.

If the government wants to speed up the switch to eco-friendly options, they could give businesses benefits to use sustainable packaging. This method brings together economic concerns with caring for the environment. It not only pushes companies to use eco-friendly materials like paper, cloth, grass, and soil, but it also helps build a more stable and long-lasting future.

The 2010 Jute Packaging Act is a good example of how the government is trying to cut down on plastic use. Efforts to cut down on single-use plastics stress the importance of getting a lot of people involved. Active participation from people from all walks of life is key to the success of these projects. So, it's very important for people to know more about how plastic packaging affects the earth. The government can change the way people act by educating and reaching out to them. This will help create a culture that values sustainable practices and knows that everyone has a part to play in protecting the environment for future generations.

In essence, the battle against plastic pollution in the hot food delivery sector demands collective action and a fundamental shift in practices. By adopting sustainable alternatives, raising awareness, and promoting responsible consumption, stakeholders can work together to ensure a healthier, more balanced future for Bangladesh and contribute to the global effort to combat plastic pollution.

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Writer: Public Relations Officer MoFA

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