



And What Happens with the Garbage in Bolivia?

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Opinion

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Opinion

Garbage in Bolivia as well as in the entire world is a problem that is gradually increasing. The World Bank prepared a report in 2018 entitled "What a Waste 2.0", where it indicates that the world generates 2010 million tons of municipal solid waste annually. This would be equivalent in weight to more than 14 million blue whales. This generated garbage is "suffocating" the oceans, lakes, rivers, clogging the drains and as a direct consequence producing floods, transmitting diseases, increasing respiratory conditions due to the burning of the same garbage, in itself, it is turning our planet into a sewer. But things get complicated, the report's estimates suggest that this figure would increase to 3.4 billion tons of solid waste by the year 2050 [1-4].

In Bolivia, the numbers have also been increasing. According to reports from the Ministry of the Environment and Water, until a few years ago, Bolivia generated approximately 2 million tons of solid waste per year (this is equivalent to 5,400 tons per day) [5]. Of this figure, according to data from the INE (National Institute of Statistics), a little more than 70% come exclusively from the 9 capital cities and El Alto, this value is increasing over the years [6,7].

The World Bank also states that the more developed a country is, its consumption patterns increase the generation of solid waste. Likewise, there is a positive correlation between the level of per capita income and the generation of garbage, that is, the higher the income, the greater the generation of garbage [8].

On the other hand, according to the 2012 Census, approximately 43% of households in Bolivia do not have

any garbage collection service. Therefore, they look for alternative ways to dispose of their garbage. These ways include: throwing the garbage on a vacant lot or on the street, throwing it into the river, burning it, burying it, or other.

Undoubtedly, the panorama is worrisome considering that in seven departments more than 40% of households throw their garbage on vacant land, on the street, in the river, they burn it, bury it or another. However, even though garbage collection coverage is 100%, the garbage problem would continue, since Bolivia barely recycles 4% of the 5,400 tons of garbage it generates per day.

On the other hand, the data from the Solid Waste Management Diagnosis, of the solid waste generated nationwide, the organic fraction represents 55.2%, the recyclable fraction (paper, plastic and glass) 22.1%, and 22.7% is considered non-usable waste. Which shows us that approximately 75% of the waste could be used (Ministry of Environment and Water). In addition, according to INE data, 83% of solid waste comes from homes, 10% from markets, 4% from industry and slaughterhouses, 2% from public areas, and 1% from hospitals. With which it is inferred that the change is found mainly in the habits and decisions of households, in addition to policies that promote reduction, reuse and recycling.

Countries like Switzerland and Sweden, which would serve as an example, because they manage to recycle or reuse more than 96% of their waste, demonstrate that the solution to the garbage problem is in our hands since both countries present a separation of the quite exhaustive garbage, the same that has allowed more than 90% of glass containers to return to factories to be reused, generate energy through garbage (Waste to Energy), and even import solid waste, among others.

With this panorama, in Bolivia, the garbage problem is quite critical and with a tendency to increase. Although garbage is no longer observed on the streets, it does not mean that the garbage problem does not continue. We must have, as a country, a management of policies that lead to an adequate management of the solid waste that we generate, both for the well-being of the population and the environment.

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