

# Turn trash to treasure

Dr Muhammad Zeshan | 18 November, 2024

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Speaking of smartphones, let's dream big for a second. Picture this: high-tech refurbishment centers in our Special Economic Zones, giving new life to electronics from around the world. We're talking sophisticated facilities recovering precious metals and feeding them back into global supply chains. With the world's e-waste expected to

hit 82 million tonnes by 2030, that's not just an environmental play – it's a gold mine waiting to happen.

But wait, there's more. Remember those endless fields of cotton we're famous for? Well, the fashion industry has a dirty secret – it's one of the world's biggest polluters. But what if Pakistan became the go-to place for textile recycling? Some clever folks in Karachi are already turning factory scraps into new fabric. Imagine scaling that up: entire industrial parks where one factory's waste becomes another's raw material. Global brands are desperate to green their supply chains – we could be their circular solution.

Now, let's talk about our farmers. Every year, they burn millions of tonnes of crop residue, turning our winter skies into a smoky mess. But here's the cool part: by 2036, our crop residue will increase by 57 per cent compared to 2018 levels. Instead of seeing this as a problem, let's see it as an opportunity. Those rice husks and cotton stalks? They could be transformed into biodegradable packaging, construction materials, or even energy. Just the buffalo waste alone (yes, buffalo waste) could generate over 40 per cent of our energy by 2036. That's not bull – that's brilliant!

The best part? We've got the perfect workforce for this revolution. With 64 per cent of our population under 30, we've got millions of young, tech-savvy minds ready to tackle these challenges. They don't just want jobs – they want meaningful work that makes a difference. And let's be honest, saving the planet while making money? That's pretty meaningful.

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But here's where it gets real. This isn't just some tree-hugger's fantasy. The World Economic Forum has already partnered with Pakistan to tackle our plastic problem. We've got ambitious goals –

like cutting plastic waste in the Indus River Basin by 50 per cent by 2030. That's great, but why stop there? Why not turn Pakistan into a circular economy powerhouse?

Of course, there's a catch (isn't there always?). We need to get serious about infrastructure. We need proper collection and sorting systems. We need quality control that meets international standards. We need our universities to start teaching circular economy skills. And yes, we need the government to step up with smart policies and incentives.

Some folks might say this is too ambitious for Pakistan. But remember when everyone said the same thing about our IT sector? Or our fintech revolution? Look where we are now. The global circular economy isn't just coming – it's here. Major brands are falling over themselves to prove their green credentials. The EU's Green Deal is changing how the whole world does business.

Here's the bottom line: we can either watch from the sidelines as others capture this opportunity, or we can get in the game. Yes, it requires investment. Yes, it means changing how we think about waste. But with 50,438 tonnes of daily waste, 6.4 million tonnes of annual plastic waste, and millions of young people looking for opportunities, can we really afford not to try?

The pieces are already falling into place. We've got the waste (plenty of it). We've got the workforce. We've got global partners interested in what we're doing. Now we just need the vision to put it all together.

So here's my pitch: let's make 'Circular in Pakistan' more than just a slogan. Let's make it a reality. Let's turn our trash mountains into gold mines. Let's transform our agricultural waste into energy. Let's make our textile industry the global leader in sustainable fashion. Let's show the world that Pakistan isn't just part of the circular economy conversation – we're leading it.

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