

Indian school demands waste plastic as 'fees'

June 5 2019, by Anup Sharma



Indian students put plastic bags inside bottles to make eco-bricks, which will be used for construction purposes at the Akshar Forum school in Assam state

One school in northeast India has taken a novel approach to addressing the scourge of plastic waste by making its collection a condition of free attendance.

Every week the 110 pupils at the Akshar Forum [school](#) outside Dispur in Assam state must bring up to 20 items of [plastic](#) gathered from their homes and the local area.

"The use of plastics is rampant across Assam," said Parmita Sarma, who set up the project together with her New Yorker husband Mazin Mukhtar.

Until last year schooling was completely without charge, but the school decided to introduce the plastic "fee" after a plea to [parents](#) to take part in a recycling scheme fell on deaf ears, Mukhtar told AFP.

"We tell (the parents) to send the plastics to the school as fees if you want your children to study here for free."

In addition, the parents have to make a "pledge" not to burn plastics, said Sarma.

Awareness

The fact that the children now go from home to home asking for plastics has also increased awareness in the [local area](#).

According to local non-governmental organisation Environ, Dispur alone—home to just under a million people—produces 37 tonnes of waste rubbish daily, a seven-fold rise over 14 years.



Parmita Sarma and Mazin Mukhtar (pictured) have set up a project to collect and recycle waste plastic at a school in India



Students must collect bags full of plastic to take to school, as part of a new project to cut waste in the local area



In India, plastic pollution is causing widespread harm to the environment

"Earlier, we used to burn the plastics and we had no idea that the gas emitted from that was harmful to our health and environment," said Menu Bora, the mother of one pupil.

"We also threw these away in the neighbourhood. But that would never happen again... This is a good step initiated by the school."

After collection, the school makes good use of the plastic waste.

Pupils stuff [plastic bags](#) inside [plastic bottles](#) to make "eco bricks" which can then be used to construct new school buildings, toilet buildings or

pathways.

The students are also paid to do this, something which dovetails with another aim of the school: getting children out of the local stone quarries and into education.

"The parents of most of our [school students](#) cannot afford to send them to school," Mukhtar said. "It was tough but we have motivated them and brought them back to the school."

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Citation: Indian school demands waste plastic as 'fees' (2019, June 5) retrieved 22 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-06-indian-school-demands-plastic-fees.html>

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