

## CASE STUDY

# Potential for energy recovery from municipal plastic wastes generated in Nigeria

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received 23 June 2019

Revised 12 August 2019

Accepted 7 September 2019

#### Keywords:

Electricity

Nigeria

Plastic wastes

Pyrolysis

Waste-to-Energy (WTE)

### ABSTRACT

Management of municipal solid wastes (MSW) in most developed societies now involves the use of thermo-chemical conversion methods. This leads to energy and material recovery while also protecting the environment. However, till date most of the wastes generated in Nigeria (including plastic wastes) are either land-filled or openly burnt. These methods are not sustainable and environmentally non-friendly. The reason is that so much space will be needed to accommodate the ever increasing wastes as a result of land-filling and open burning leads to environmental pollution and health challenges. Also, the inherent energy in plastic wastes, as a result of the fact that they have their origins from oil and gas, is not recovered for the benefit of meeting the energy requirements of the populace. Meanwhile there is serious inadequate supply of heat and electricity, the production of which could be improved if the plastic wastes are also applied for electricity and heat generation. This study estimated the amount of energy loss due to the prevailing method of disposal adopted for plastic wastes in terms of quantity of oil and electricity that could have been produced if thermo-chemical approaches were adopted for these wastes. It showed that about 17.3 million barrels of crude oil (worth about \$1 billion) and 7.1 million MWh of electricity (capable of powering 4.4 million households) could be produced from the plastic wastes generated in the country. Therefore, plastic wastes should be embraced and treated as a resource rather than “wastes”.

DOI:10.22034/IJHCUM.2019.04.05

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## INTRODUCTION

Globally management of the enormous and ever increasing amount of plastic wastes is of huge concerns both in developed and especially in developing societies (Koushal *et al.*, 2014). This concern is largely due to the negative impact that irresponsible and careless handling of plastic wastes has on the environment (Olusunmade *et al.*, 2018a). Since its development, plastic has played significant

role in the lives of people because many products are made from the material such as household items, automotive and aerospace parts, electronics, building and construction materials, etc. As a result of certain desirable properties that plastic possesses (i.e. durability, cheap, low density, resistance to corrosion, etc.), it has successfully and consistently been used to replace traditional materials like wood, ceramics and metal in some applications (Wong *et al.*, 2015) However, the non-biodegradability of plastics makes them linger in the environment for hundreds

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of years. The additives that are introduced to make plastic durable are released as toxins as plastics linger in landfills into water beds poisoning humans and animals that drink the water. Open burning of these wastes also results in the pollution of the environment. Plastic wastes block water drainages leading to erosion and flooding. Eventually, they find their way to large bodies of water and cause deaths of aquatic lives (Olusunmade et al., 2018b) who feed on them “imagining” they are foods. Tons of plastic wastes in landfill also create horrible sights, particularly in developing societies where landfills are not properly managed. Because of the danger that plastic wastes pose, there is need to develop responsible waste management policies that will protect the environment from these wastes. With the emergence of new approaches to waste management (pyrolysis, gasification and waste-to-energy), plastic wastes is now gradually being seen as a resource rather than a problem, because of the possibility of material and energy recovery that could result from these wastes. Plastics are obtained by the synthesis of chemicals derived from natural gas/crude oil (ACC, 2005; Al-Salem, 2010). The production process for plastics starts with the distillation of crude oil in a refinery. This allows the heavy crude oil to break down into lighter components referred to as fractions. One of these fractions, naphtha, is an important feedstock of choice for plastic production (PlasticsEurope, 2018). Naphtha is processed in furnaces with high temperatures to obtain ethane and propane which are subsequently cracked into ethylene and propylene respectively to produce plastic polymers (polyethylene and polypropylene). Many of the other plastics available for use today are made from these polymers (Plastisisrubish, 2013). The fact that plastics have their origin from petroleum shows that they possess some energy trapped within (Olusunmade, 2019), which is lost when we just dispose of them in landfill. Applying these techniques could simultaneously help militate against the danger of plastic wastes on the environment while also producing the energy that is not so available. In Nigeria, the commonly adopted management method for plastic wastes is landfill and open burning (Olusunmade, 2019). This results in the loss of valuable energy opportunities that could be derived from these “resource”. This report, therefore, examined the potential for energy recovery from

landfill plastic wastes in Nigeria by establishing the amount of these wastes generated annually within a period and hence estimated the energy loss as a result of that choice of waste management practice. Nigeria is the world’s 29th largest economy as of 2019, worth about \$500 billion of nominal GDP (Statistics Times, 2019) and is considered to be an emerging market and global power. As a result of economic development and population growth, waste management is a major challenge in Nigeria. This problem is attributable to indiscriminate disposal of wastes by the populace and inability of municipal councils to effectively manage the resulting rise in industrial and domestic waste (Olusunmade, 2019). This study has been carried out in Nigeria in 2019.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

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### *Description of the study area*

Nigeria is a country in West Africa, bordering Niger in the north, Chad in the northeast, Cameroon in the east, and Benin in the west. Its coast in the south is located on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. It lays between longitudes 3 and 14 degrees and latitudes 4 and 140 degrees. The land mass of the country is 923,768 sq. km. and is divided into 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as can be seen in Fig. 1. It is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world.

### *Research design*

It is generally assumed that as a country advances economically and its population grows, there is an increase in the per capita waste generation rates i.e. there is a linear relationship between GDP per capita and waste generation. The model adopted in this study uses the World Bank’s Development indicator’s GDP per capita to determine the per capita waste generation rate and the total annual waste generation in the country. The model was developed using the available baseline waste generation data in the country and the GDP per capita from the associated year. A linear regression method was developed to predict the waste generation in any specified year given the GDP per capita for that year. Oguntoyinbo (2012) estimated that the amount of waste generated in Nigeria in 2009 is 27,614,830 tons. Kaza et al., (2018) puts the waste generated per person daily in the country as of 2016 to be 0.51kg. Considering the population of Nigeria for 2016 from World Bank



Fig. 1: Geographic location of the study area in Nigeria showing all 36 States and FCT

open data, which was estimated at 185,989,640, the amount of waste generated by the country amounted to 34,620,000 tons. Using these baselines, a regression model was developed.

$$\text{Annual Waste Generated/Person} = 0.025 (\text{GDP per capita}) + 130.4$$

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Wastes generation in Nigeria

It was estimated by the World Bank Group that the amount of plastic wastes in MSW is about 8-12%

in different countries of the world (Hornweg and Bhada-Tata, 2012) while in Sub-Sahara Africa, a region which Nigeria belongs, it accounts for 11% of the total MSW (Kaza et al., 2018). Using this estimate and applying the model developed, the plastic wastes and the overall MSW generated in Nigeria from 2000 to 2018 was determined and are presented in Table 1. Estimates of plastic wastes in different States and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of the country in 2016 are also shown in Table 2, according to the population figures available from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2017).

Table 1: Estimates of waste generated in Nigeria between 2000 and 2018

Year	GDP per capita (\$)	Amount of waste generated (tons)	Amount of plastic wastes generated (tons)
2018	2049	35,961,750.00	3,955,792.500
2017	1968.4	34,285,090.14	3,771,359.915
2016	2175.7	34,369,490.55	3,780,643.960
2015	2729.8	35,990,846.74	3,958,993.142
2014	3221.7	37,223,019.02	4,094,532.092
2013	2997.0	35,280,851.02	3,880,893.612
2012	2745.9	33,300,105.34	3,663,011.587
2011	2519.3	31,497,576.92	3,464,733.462
2010	2291.4	29,762,760.73	3,273,903.680
2009	1890.4	27,431,091.30	3,017,420.043
2008	2241.7	28,031,143.26	3,083,425.759
2007	1882.5	25,983,530.41	2,858,188.345
2006	1655.5	24,499,317.99	2,694,924.978
2005	1267.7	22,521,047.66	2,477,315.243
2004	1007.3	21,064,877.88	2,317,136.567
2003	795.0	19,832,171.95	2,181,538.914
2002	741.3	19,162,654.79	2,107,892.027
2001	590.1	18,211,330.52	2,003,246.358
2000	567.6	17,690,877.13	1,945,996.484

Table 2: Plastic wastes generation in Nigerian States and FCT in 2016

State	Population	Amount of plastic wastes generated (tons)
Abuja	3,564,126	72390.78498
Abia	3,727,347	75705.95855
Adamawa	4,248,436	86289.77117
Akwa Ibom	5,482,177	111348.2229
Anambra	5,527,809	112275.0522
Bauchi	6,537,314	132779.0578
Bayelsa	2,277,961	46267.55197
Benue	5,741,815	116621.7174
Borno	5,860,183	119025.8839
Cross River	3,866,269	78527.59635
Delta	5,663,362	115028.2624
Ebonyi	2,880,383	58503.31509
Edo	4,235,595	86028.95827
Ekiti	3,270,798	66433.01464
Enugu	4,411,119	89594.01745
Gombe	3,256,962	66151.99233
Imo	5,408,756	109856.9727
Jigawa	5,828,163	118375.5273
Kaduna	8,252,366	167613.3932
Kano	13,076,892	265604.0996
Katsina	7,831,319	159061.5286
Kebbi	4,440,050	90181.63355
Kogi	4,473,490	90860.83172
Kwara	3,192,893	64850.69008
Lagos	12,550,598	254914.5684
Nassarawa	2,523,395	51252.54968
Niger	5,556,247	112852.655
Ogun	5,217,716	105976.7688
Ondo	4,671,695	94886.56356
Osun	4,705,589	95574.9829
Oyo	7,840,864	159255.3967
Plateau	4,200,442	85314.96744
Rivers	7,303,924	148349.6352
Sokoto	4,998,090	101515.9561
Taraba	3,066,834	62290.31203
Yobe	3,294,137	66907.0519
Zamfara	4,515,427	91712.61203
Total	193,500,543	3,930,179.854

### Energy potential from plastic wastes in Nigeria

As previously highlighted, the waste management system in the country does not include energy recovery from generated wastes (including plastic), as it relies solely on landfill and open burning. However, in many developed cities in the world, energy is recovered from non-recycled plastic (NRP) which could have been sent landfills at waste-to-energy (WTE) facilities by combustion to generate steam and electricity (GBB, 2013; Wienenergie, 2014); by pyrolysis to produce oil and by gasification to produce syngas. In 2011, an estimated 3.9 million tons of plastic wastes were processed in this ways in the US (Themelis and Mussche, 2014). Municipal plastic

wastes consist primarily of LDPE, HDPE, PET, PP, PS and PVC and about 50-70% of the total plastic wastes is packaging materials derived from these types of plastics (Kunwar *et al.*, 2016). Table 3 presents the energy content of these plastics prevalent in MSW in

Table 3: Low heating value of plastic materials (Themelis and Mussche, 2014)

Plastic waste material	LHV (MJ/kg)	LHV (Million Btu/ton)
PET	23.9	20.5
HDPE	44.3	38.0
PVC	19.2	16.5
LDPE	44.3	38.0
PP	44.3	38.0
PS	41.5	35.6

Table 4: Typical MSW plastic wastes composition (Bodzey and Banhegyi, 2016; Themelis and Mussche, 2014)

Plastic wastes composition	% in plastic wastes	LHV of plastic types (MJ/kg)	Plastic wastes fraction LHV (MJ/kg)	Plastic wastes fraction LHV (Million Btu/ton)
PET	10%	23.9	2.4	2.1
HDPE	19%	44.3	8.4	7.2
PVC	6%	19.2	1.2	1.0
LDPE	23%	44.3	10.2	8.7
PP	14%	44.3	6.2	5.3
PS	9%	41.5	3.7	3.2
Others	19%	25.0	4.8	4.1
Total plastic wastes	100%		36.9	31.6

Table 5: Energy equivalent of plastic wastes generated in different States of Nigeria in 2016

State	Amount of plastic wastes generated (tons)	LHV (Million Btu/ton)	Barrel of Oil equivalent (BoE)	Electricity equivalent (MWh)
Abuja	72390.78498	2287548.805	393805.8703	130303.413
Abia	75705.95855	2392308.29	411840.4145	136270.7254
Adamawa	86289.77117	2726756.769	469416.3552	155321.5881
Akwa Ibom	111348.2229	3518603.845	605734.3328	200426.8013
Anambra	112275.0522	3547891.65	610776.284	202095.094
Bauchi	132779.0578	4195818.226	722318.0744	239002.304
Bayelsa	46267.55197	1462054.642	251695.4827	83281.59355
Benue	116621.7174	3685246.269	634422.1425	209919.0913
Borno	119025.8839	3761217.931	647500.8084	214246.591
Cross River	78527.59635	2481472.045	427190.1241	141349.6734
Delta	115028.2624	3634893.092	625753.7475	207050.8723
Ebonyi	58503.31509	1848704.757	318258.0341	105305.9672
Edo	86028.95827	2718515.081	467997.533	154852.1249
Ekiti	66433.01464	2099283.263	361395.5996	119579.4263
Enugu	89594.01745	2831170.952	487391.4549	161269.2314
Gombe	66151.99233	2090402.958	359866.8383	119073.5862
Imo	109856.9727	3471480.337	597621.9314	197742.5508
Jigawa	118375.5273	3740666.662	643962.8684	213075.9491
Kaduna	167613.3932	5296583.225	911816.859	301704.1078
Kano	265604.0996	8393089.546	1444886.302	478087.3792
Katsina	159061.5286	5026344.305	865294.7158	286310.7516
Kebbi	90181.63355	2849739.62	490588.0865	162326.9404
Kogi	90860.83172	2871202.282	494282.9245	163549.4971
Kwara	64850.69008	2049281.806	352787.754	116731.2421
Lagos	254914.5684	8055300.363	1386735.252	458846.2232
Nassarawa	51252.54968	1619580.57	278813.8702	92254.58942
Niger	112852.655	3566143.898	613918.4432	203134.779
Ogun	105976.7688	3348865.894	576513.6222	190758.1838
Ondo	94886.56356	2998415.409	516182.9058	170795.8144
Osun	95574.9829	3020169.46	519927.907	172034.9692
Oyo	159255.3967	5032470.534	866349.3578	286659.714
Plateau	85314.96744	2695952.971	464113.4229	153566.9414
Rivers	148349.6352	4687848.471	807022.0153	267029.3433
Sokoto	101515.9561	3207904.212	552246.8011	182728.721
Taraba	62290.31203	1968373.86	338859.2975	112122.5617
Yobe	66907.0519	2114262.84	363974.3623	120432.6934
Zamfara	91712.61203	2898118.54	498916.6094	165082.7016
Total	3,930,179.854	124,193,683.4	21,380,178.4	7,074,323.737

terms of the lower heating value (LHV).

Table 4 shows the typical composition of plastic wastes in MSW and the average low heating value (LHV) of the major constituents.

This shows that for every ton of plastic wastes there is equivalent energy content of 31.6 million Btu. When compared with other available fuels, a ton of plastic wastes represents 5.44 barrels of oil, 30680 standard cubic feet of natural gas and 1.44 tons of coal since 1 barrel of oil equals 5.8 million Btu, 1000 standard cubic feet of natural gas equals 1.03 million Btu and 1 ton of coal equals 22 million Btu (Themelis and Mussche, 2014). Based on these estimates, Table 5 presents the energy potential of all the States and FCT in Nigeria according to their plastic wastes generation as at 2016.

#### *Energy generation potential via plastic wastes pyrolysis route*

Pyrolysis is the thermo-chemical decomposition of organic (carbon-based) materials. It is the first step in gasification and combustion and occurs in the absence or near absence of oxygen to produce predominantly oils and some gases. In industrial applications the temperatures used are often 430 °C or higher (Boslaugh, 2018). Assuming all the plastic wastes generated in 2018 in the country were converted to energy rather than sent to landfill, the energy generated would have amounted to  $(3,955,792.5 \times 31.6)$  Million Btu = 125003043 Million Btu = 21.6 million barrels of oil. However, a realistic thermal efficiency of pyrolysis plants is 80% (4R Sustainability, 2011; Haig et al., 2018). This means that one ton of plastic wastes will produce 4.35 barrels of oil. As such the plastic wastes generated in 2018 would have resulted in the production of 17.3 million barrels of crude oil. In 2018, a barrel of oil costs \$70 (Garside, 2019). Therefore, the worth of the crude oil produced from the process of pyrolysis of plastic wastes in 2018 would be about \$1 billion.

#### *Energy generation potential via waste-to-electricity route*

In waste-to-energy (WTE) plants, wastes is burnt in a combustion chamber and the resulting heat is used to generate steam, which is then used power a turbine generator that produces electricity (UNEP, 2017). New WTE plants have the capacity

to generate 0.6MWh/ton of MSW. The fact that the LHV of plastic wastes is about 3 times higher than that of MSW means the combustion of plastic wastes in such WTE plants will lead to the generation of about 1.8MWh of electricity/ton of plastic wastes (Themelis and Mussche, 2014). The conversion of all the plastic wastes generated in 2018 in the country, would produce  $(3955792.5 \times 1.8\text{MWh}) = 7.1$  million MWh of electricity. Olaniyan et al., (2018) estimated electricity consumption per capita in Nigeria at an average value 0.324MWh per annum. The average number of persons in a Nigerian household is 5 (NPC, 2013). Therefore, the electricity consumption by a household will be  $(0.324\text{MWh} \times 5) = 1.62\text{MWh}$ . This showed that the amount of electricity from the plastic wastes generated in the country is able to power 4.4 million households.

## CONCLUSION

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Most of the wastes generated in Nigeria (including plastics) are either land-filled or openly burnt. These methods are not sustainable and environmentally non-friendly. So much space will be needed to accommodate the ever increasing wastes as a result of land-filling. Open burning leads to environmental pollution and health challenges. Also, the inherent energy in plastic wastes is not recovered for the benefit of meeting the energy requirements of the populace. This study estimated the amount of energy loss from the method of disposal currently adopted for management of plastic wastes, in terms of quantity of oil and electricity that could have been produced if thermo-chemical approaches are utilized for these wastes. It showed that about 17.3 million barrels of crude oil (worth about \$1 billion) and 7.1 million MWh of electricity (capable of powering 4.4 million households) could be produced from the plastic wastes generated in the country. It is therefore important at this present time that all stakeholders involved in waste management begin to see and treat plastic wastes as a resource rather than “wastes”. The adoption of thermo-chemical conversion methods will lead to getting value of these materials and therefore a necessity.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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The authors express profound gratitude to their dear families for their support and understanding.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/or falsification, double publication and/or submission, and redundancies have been completely observed by the authors.

## ABBREVIATIONS

MSW	Municipal Solid Wastes
MWh	Megawatt-Hour
\$	US Dollar
ACC	American Chemistry Council
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Kg	Kilogram
NBS	Nigeria Bureau of Statistics
NRP	Non Recycled Plastics
WTE	Waste to Energy
LDPE	Low Density Polyethylene
HDPE	High Density Polyethylene
PET	Polyethylene terephthalate
PP	Polypropylene
PS	Polystyrene
PVC	Polyvinyl chloride
LHV	Low Heating Value
MJ	MegaJoule
kWh	KiloWatt-Hour
BoE	Barrel of Oil Equivalent
UNEP	United Nation Environmental Programme

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**HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE**

*Olusunmade, O.F., Yusuf, T.A., Ogunnigbo, C.O.; (2019). Potential for energy recovery from municipal plastic wastes generated in Nigeria. Int. J. Hum. Capital Urban Manage., 4(4): 295-302.*

**DOI:** [10.22034/IJHCUM.2019.04.05](https://doi.org/10.22034/IJHCUM.2019.04.05)

**url:** [http://www.ijhcum.net/article\\_36182.html](http://www.ijhcum.net/article_36182.html)

