

Food for Thought

Reducing the Waste, Enhancing Global Security

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As the global environmental crisis deepens, the connections between Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) issues and global security have manifested in our world today.

Being a leading ESG challenge, food waste has taken the center stage, particularly as nations strive to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024, SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) are at critical junctures, and food waste stands as a significant barrier to achieving them.

In Indonesia, an estimated 13 million tons of food are wasted annually, yet approximately 23 million people remain undernourished (United Nations, 2024). This staggering

contrast presents an existential threat not only to environmental sustainability, but also to global stability itself.

The securitization theory by Barry Buzan and the constructivist approach within global governance provide valuable frameworks for interpreting food waste as more than just an environmental issue. This issue has the potential to evolve into a global security threat. Therefore, by framing food waste as a matter of security, it underscores the need for both urgent policy intervention and collective action (Buzan, 1998).

This article will demonstrate how ESG and security, when approached through a constructivist lens, make connections to show how food waste is a key challenge in the global agenda.



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Source: United Nations (2024)

Global Norms and Constructivism in ESG Strategies

The global policy in response to food waste is grounded in shifting norms, as highlighted by constructivist theory, which posits that global issues are shaped by evolving values and collective action, rather than being driven solely by material or power-based interests, like realists. Over the past decade, food waste has increasingly been viewed as not only an environmental issue, but also a key ethical and social challenge.

Constructivism sees that as global norms evolve around sustainability, governance, and equity, food waste is increasingly viewed as a failure of ethical governance (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Governments, corporations, and civil society must take a proactive approach, aligning food waste reduction with broader ESG and security goals (United Nations, 2024).

The Food Waste Index Report 2024 stresses that effective policy measures must involve cross-sectoral collaboration, including public-private partnerships and community-led initiatives. Indonesia's National Food Waste and Food Loss Strategy, introduced in recent years, exemplifies how a country can integrate security, sustainability, and governance frameworks into its food management policies (Indonesia Ministry of Agriculture, 2021).

SDG 12 specifically targets the reduction of food waste through responsible production and consumption patterns, aiming to divide the per capita global food waste into equal portions between retail and consumer levels by 2030. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 highlights

that global progress remains uneven, with some countries advancing toward the target while others, like Indonesia, still face considerable challenges. Indonesia's food production accounts for nearly 30% of its food waste, which is a significant strain on resources, given that nearly 5.5% of the population is undernourished (FAO, 2023). This imbalance highlights the necessity of a stronger alignment between global norms of sustainable consumption and local-level practices.

The Food Waste Index Report 2024 also highlights that while high-income countries waste more food at the consumption level, developing countries like Indonesia primarily experience waste earlier in the supply chain due to inefficiencies in harvesting, storage, and transportation. Nearly 40% of food waste in Indonesia occurs before it even reaches consumers, underscoring the need for policy reforms and technological advancements to optimize food distribution.

Food Waste as a Security Threat and Global Challenge

ESG issues like food waste must be understood through a global security lens. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024 shows that food insecurity and resource depletion disproportionately affect the world's most vulnerable populations. As a result, this threatens political stability, particularly in regions like Southeast Asia, where food shortages and climate change are increasingly intertwined (United Nations, 2024). Indonesia's vulnerability to climate change, exacerbated by deforestation and unsustainable agricultural practices, makes the securitization of food waste an urgent policy priority.



Food waste contributes to several layers of environmental and social insecurity. It is stated in the Food Waste Index Report 2024 that the global food system is responsible for around 8-10% of greenhouse gas emissions, largely from the methane produced by rotting food.

As for Indonesia, they face a critical challenge, as the breakdown of food waste in landfills plays a substantial role in releasing methane, a highly potent greenhouse gas (UNEP, 2024). When paired with deforestation and declining freshwater resources, heavily influenced by food production, this worsens environmental harm and jeopardizes national security (IPCC, 2023).

Barry Buzan in his securitization study illustrates that when food waste is reframed as a security issue, it warrants extraordinary policy measures (Buzan, 1998). As environmental degradation accelerates, food security becomes threatened, which in turn increases the risk of social unrest and, consequentially, political instability. For instance, Indonesia's food insecurity problem is tied to food waste, which strains already vulnerable ecosystems and heightens resource competition. When food resources become scarce, prices rise and tensions escalate, particularly in regions already grappling with economic disparities.



40%

of food waste in Indonesia occurs before it even reaches consumers

Source: The Food Waste Index Report 2024

Unlocking the Potential of a Circular Economy to Combat Food Waste

Transitioning to a circular economy, as championed by SDG 12, offers a transformative solution to the problem of food waste. In a circular system, resources are reused and repurposed, thereby reducing waste at every stage of the supply chain. The Food Waste Index Report 2024 highlights successful circular economy models in countries like Denmark and Japan, where significant reductions in food waste have been achieved through improved food management systems and policies incentivizing waste reduction (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2023).

In Indonesia, adopting similar circular economy initiatives, such as composting organic waste, promoting food redistribution networks, and implementing efficient storage technologies, could make a substantial difference. Indonesia currently recycles less than 2% of its food waste, yet this untapped potential could be leveraged to reduce emissions, create jobs, and alleviate food insecurity (World Resources Institute, 2024). By building infrastructure for food redistribution, establishing community-based composting programs, and developing innovative storage technologies, Indonesia could move closer to the SDG 12 target while simultaneously addressing its own food security challenges.

Moreover, businesses must take on a proactive role in food waste management by integrating ESG principles into their operations. This can be achieved through several concrete actions:

■ Conducting regular food waste audits

To measure and analyze waste, identifying key areas for improvement (World Resources Institute, 2020).

■ Setting measurable reduction targets

To track progress and decrease food waste across operations (UNEP, 2024).

■ Optimizing inventory management systems

To better forecast demand and avoid overstocking, reducing excess waste (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2023).

■ Partnering with local food recovery organizations

To redistribute surplus food, thus supporting local communities and addressing food insecurity. Food banks are an example of such organizations (WRAP, 2022).

■ Investing in smart packaging and predictive technologies

Monitoring food freshness and extending shelf life, which enhances efficiency and reduces waste throughout the supply chain (IFWC, 2023).

■ Launching internal awareness campaigns

To educate employees through workshops and initiatives focused on food waste reduction at all levels (WRAP, 2023).

■ Creating waste-reduction task forces

To develop and execute strategies for minimizing food waste within the organization (European Commission, 2023).

Through these actions, companies can significantly reduce waste, enhance their ESG profiles, strengthen community ties, and contribute directly to social equity and environmental sustainability.

Conclusion

The urgent issue of food waste stands as a crucial issue for both ESG challenges and global security threats, especially evident in Indonesia. The alarming statistic of 13 million tons of food wasted annually colligated with millions facing undernutrition highlight a dire situation that endangers both ecological stability and social cohesion. Therefore, it is essential to reconceptualize food waste as a significant security concern.

By reframing food waste through the lens of security and integrating circular economy practices, both governments and corporations can address the root causes of food insecurity and environmental degradation. At the corporate level, promoting sustainability frameworks that target food waste reduction can help organizations stay ahead of evolving ESG trends while contributing to a broader, global security agenda. Based on Barry Buzan's perspective, it can be suggested that only when food waste is recognized as a threat to global stability can meaningful, collective action take place.

Ultimately, the alignment of ESG goals with security strategies will be crucial in mitigating the threats posed by food waste. With the adoption of circular economy principles and stronger policy frameworks, Indonesia and the world can take concrete steps to address this pressing issue, ensuring a more secure and sustainable future for all.

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