

POSITION PAPER

BEYOND THE PLASTIC HORIZON: PATHWAYS TO GLOBAL AND LOCAL REMEDICATION

About Change Initiative

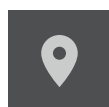
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CI was established with the aim to carry forward with the prime objective of expediting the process of founding a society premised on equity, justice, and wellbeing.

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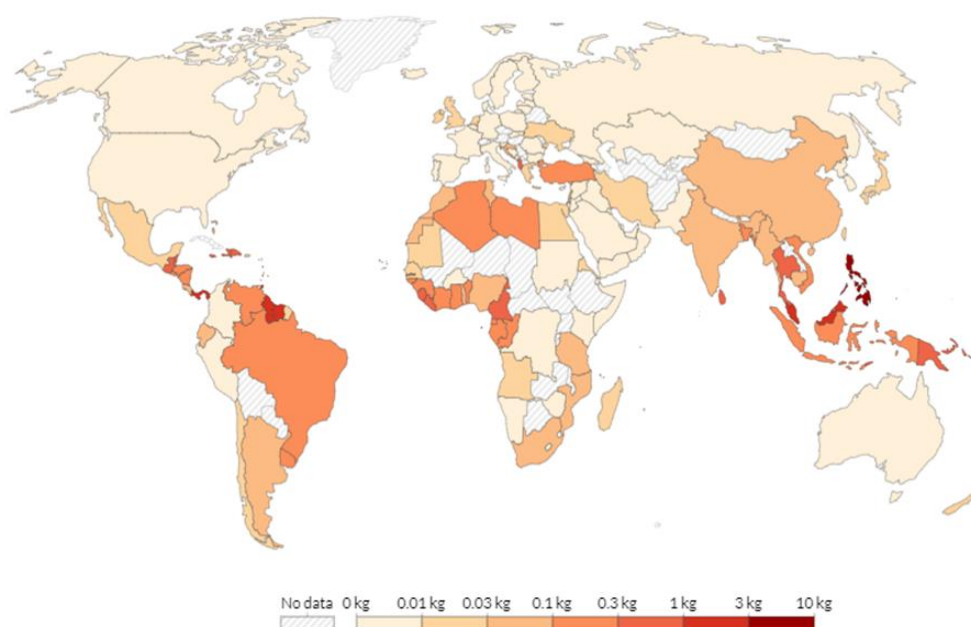


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BEYOND THE PLASTIC HORIZON: PATHWAYS TO GLOBAL AND LOCAL REMEDIATION

BACKGROUND

Plastic waste is accumulating in natural environments, causing long-term damage to ecosystems, wildlife, and human health. The widespread use of single-use plastics, driven by their affordability and convenience, contributes to the enormous amount of plastic waste generated. However, only a small percentage of plastic is recycled globally. Governments, organizations, and individuals are taking measures to combat plastic pollution, including improving waste management, promoting recycling, and increasing awareness. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is actively involved in addressing the problem and aims to develop a legally binding international agreement on plastic pollution. In Bangladesh, plastic pollution poses a severe challenge due to inadequate infrastructure and poor waste management practices. The country faces significant plastic pollution from neighboring nations through Transboundary Rivers. Despite some initiatives and bans on single-use plastics, implementation remains a challenge due to political issues and corruption. Efforts are being made to address plastic pollution in various Asian countries, including implementing laws, regulations, and policies to reduce plastic waste and promote sustainable practices. To tackle the plastic crisis effectively, it is essential to adopt global strategies focusing on efficiency, waste recovery, renewable energy, product redesign, and sufficiency.



The country as a whole use around 45.55 billion polythene bags annually, weighing approximately 273 million kg. CI surveyed identified in 2022 that average annual usage per person is approximately 269 single-uses plastic bags; around 21% of households use more than 10 polythene bags weekly, contributing to a significant number of bags used annually in Bangladesh.

Figure 1: World's Plastic Waste Emitted to the Ocean per capita, 2019

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has proposed a new model to eliminate 80% of plastic pollution by 2040 and reduce \$4.5 trillion in investment costs. The model focuses on a circular economy, emphasizing reuse, recycling, and sustainable alternatives to single-use plastics, with the possibility of a global ban on single-use plastic as early as 2030. During the second round of negotiations at the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), Bangladesh proposed a global ban on single-use plastic and a reduction in virgin plastic production, aiming to address plastic pollution worldwide.

CROSS-BORDER DUMPING OF THE PLASTIC POLLUTION ON DOWNSTREAM BANGLADESH

Bangladesh has been identified as one of the top 20 countries that contribute to plastic pollution. According to a recent study, every year, the Ganges, Meghna, and Brahmaputra rivers create 72,845 tons of plastic. Trans-boundary plastic garbage originates in China, India, Nepal, Myanmar, and Bhutan which accounts for 24 times more plastic garbage in its' waterbodies. A study revealed earlier that Bangladesh's yearly per capita plastic use in urban areas tripled, from 3.0 kg in 2005 to 9.0 kg in 2020. However, only 31% of the 977,000 tons of plastic consumed in 2020 were recycled.ⁱ

YOUTH'S EXPERIENCES ON PLASTIC POLLUTION

To assess the prevalence of plastic pollution in Bangladesh, our organization performed a nationwide study, "Youth Environmental protection and conservation Survey 2022". The results of the survey unveiled the alarming experiences of youth about plastic pollution in major town/cities of the country. A glimpse of the findings is illustrated below.

PERVERSE PREVALENCE OF PLASTIC POLLUTION:

Most respondents reported that polythene is scattered everywhere in their locality, indicating a high prevalence of plastic pollution. Among the surveyed youth 40% of respondents indicated that they have seen polythene bags being scattered everywhere in their locality. Moreover, around 35% and 19% have an affirmative indication of plastic pollution and think it is increasing at an alarming rate. Furthermore, 19% of surveyed youth noticed alarming plastic pollution and only 6% of respondents claimed there was no plastic pollution.

HAZARDOUS CONSEQUENCES OF PLASTIC POLLUTION:

Plastic pollution is causing navigability crises in numerous water bodies, affecting around 23% of respondents. Waterlogging difficulties, also caused by plastic waste, were reported by 22% of respondents. Moreover, about 56% respondents reported facing health-related issues due to plastic pollution. Diseases attributed to plastic pollution were reported by 34% of respondents occasionally and 28% alarmingly.

Respondents from Mymensingh, Rangpur, Barishal, Chattogram and Narayanganj indicated navigability crisis on different water bodies as a major issue faced in their districts. Waterlogging is a major issue in districts such as Khulna, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Feni, Dhaka, and Gazipur.

GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO CURB PLASTIC POLLUTION

The government of Bangladesh prohibited the thin plastic shopping bags in 2002. Moreover, the Jute Packaging Act of 2010 supports alternate packaging for six important products such as rice, fertilizer, and paddy. Besides, a High Court order in 2020 prohibited single-use plastic in coastal areas as well as hotels and motels across the country. However, approximately 49% of respondents indicated that no actions are taken by any government regulatory bodies to combat plastic pollution, while only 2.7% reported some regular activities against pollution.

The findings from the Survey highlight the grave extent of plastic pollution in Bangladesh, with polythene scattered throughout localities, posing significant environmental and health impacts. Overall, the findings reveal a high prevalence of plastic pollution across countries with significant environmental and health impacts. However, there is also a lack of effective government regulatory actions to address the issue.

THE WAY FORWARD

Despite the challenges posed by inadequate infrastructure and poor waste management practices, there is hope for addressing this crisis through the adoption of global strategies such as the 4R principles and a legally binding international agreement on plastic pollution, as advocated by the United Nations Environment Programme. More specifically, the following measures should be adopted.

5.1. International efforts

- a) Full lifecycle of plastics in an International Legally Binding Instrument (ILBI) that becomes more comprehensive over time, with the provision of-
 - incorporating international and domestic obligations.
 - banning harmful, problematic, and unnecessary chemicals, additives, and products, contained in annexes.
 - periodically updated by the Conference of Parties.
- b) Adoption of the 4R (Refuse, Reduce, Replace and Recycle) principles in eco-friendly management of plastics through circular economy model in both international and national legal and policy regime.
 - **Refuse:** Encourages the rejection of single-use plastics and unnecessary plastic items to minimize their generation and negative environmental impacts.
 - **Reduce:** Reducing the overall consumption of plastics by promoting alternatives, encouraging responsible consumption.
 - **Replace:** Find sustainable and environmentally friendly alternatives to conventional plastics, such as biodegradable materials or reusable alternatives.
 - **Recycle:** Establishing effective recycling systems and infrastructure to divert plastic waste from landfills and oceans.
- c) Governments' regulations such as reduction of single uses of plastic bags 50% by 2025; and 100% by 2030

NATIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEVEL

- a) Governments' regulations such as reduction of single uses of plastic bags 50% by 2025; and 100% by 2030
- b) Positive and Negative incentives adopted by each government through following manners:
 - Reduced tax rate for companies initiating recycling of plastic products.
 - Fiscal incentive such as reduction of tax and interest rate for sustainable alternative producers (Mud-made household utensils, innovative materials-based products, stainless steel, glass, and natural fiber materials Mushrooms packaging, seaweed-based packaging, banana leaves and so on.)
 - Imposition of 5% pollution fees on annual turnover of any plastic producer that are not ensuring recycling of their products.
 - Prompt participation in international treaties against plastic pollution.
 - Prompt participation in international treaties against plastic pollution.
- c) Youth-led circular economic model and promote entrepreneurship on managing plastics.
- d) Encouraging youth-led plastic pollution management, area wise /community-led plastic waste management.

ⁱ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2021/12/23/meeting-bangladesh-s-plastic-challenge-through-a-multisectoral-approach>