



The Global Plastic Treaty and Ending Plastic Pollution in Nigeria
Advocating for a Plastic Treaty toward ending the Nigerian Plastic Tsunami and creating an environment free from plastic pollution: The Plastic Treaty Briefing Note



Plastics and the Environment

Plastics are a significant environmental challenge in Nigeria, and unlike other materials, it never really goes away. It takes more than 400 years to degrade with most of it still existing in some form, and others break down into microscopic pieces of plastic that are still non-biodegradable hence, can't decompose. The problem goes beyond this as plastic fragments most often find their way into the oceans and water bodies, releasing toxic chemicals into the environment, and posing a threat to the planet and biodiversity. Marine ecosystems suffer greatly as plastic debris accumulates in waterways, endangering marine species and disrupting the balance of fragile ecosystems.

Plastics And Health

The effects of plastics are very diverse as they affect health and food systems. These plastics enter the body as microplastics through inhalation, ingestion or skin contact. A local study of children and adolescents living and going to school near major dumpsites across African urban centres reported respiratory, gastrointestinal, and dermatological illnesses. But to date there is no international data on the health impacts of burning waste. (UNEP 2016).



The Nigerian plastic tsunami has dangerous impacts on the health of Nigerians especially women who suffer the most impacts. Women are more affected by plastics than men. This is because biologically, their bodies react in different ways to toxins, and the hygiene products that women use are often contaminated for instance; Tampons which may comprise up to six percent plastic, and sanitary pads consist of up to 90 percent petroleum-based plastic. This puts them at greater risks of diseases like breast cancer, and affects their unborn babies in the case of pregnant women.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the health risks of plastic pollution. Exposure to harmful chemicals from plastics during early development can lead to long-term health problems and developmental issues.

Plastic and Poverty

Plastic waste and poverty are interconnected challenges in Nigeria. Plastic pollution is a significant environmental problem, with Nigeria being one of the highest contributors to plastic waste in Africa. Improper disposal and inadequate waste management infrastructure lead to the accumulation of plastic in streets, water bodies, and landfills, causing pollution and harming ecosystems.

The issue of plastic waste exacerbates poverty in Nigeria. While many people rely on the sorting and collection to make wealth, others like fisher folks lament poor catch due to the volume of plastics found in different forms in our water bodies. Many Waste pickers are exposed to imminent danger due to poor waste management culture due to government actions. However, the lack of government support for effective recycling facilities, limited market demand, and low prices for recycled plastic make it challenging for these individuals to escape poverty.

The presence of plastic debris in farmland hampers agricultural productivity, leading to reduced yields and incomes for farmers. Additionally, plastic pollution can deter tourists, reducing revenue generated from the tourism industry, particularly in coastal areas.

Plastic and Climate Change

Transport, energy, and agriculture are the sectors most often blamed for climate change. However, the number of emissions released into the atmosphere by plastic production, usage, and disposal are mostly disregarded, the rapid increase in plastic usage has extensive effects on climate change as well, and while their impact on the climate is less well-known, it is just as significant.

Plastic production is one of the largest and fastest-growing contributors to these emissions, and Plastics when improperly disposed of, produce two greenhouse gases (methane and ethylene).

The Center for International Environmental Law estimates that at the current and projected level of growth, the production of plastics alone could generate **53.5 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions by 2050**. In addition, the incineration of waste plastic pushes this total to nearly **56 billion metric tons**. In other words, plastics alone could consume between 10 and 13 percent of the earth's remaining carbon budget while staying below 1.5 degrees. Incineration is not a better solution because burning plastic waste leads to black carbon, which has a global warming potential almost 5,000 times greater than carbon dioxide (CO₂). The extraction and transport of fossil fuels for plastic production produce significant greenhouse gases. Sources include direct emissions, like methane leakage and flaring; emissions from fuel combustion and energy consumption in the drilling for oil or gas; and emissions caused by land disturbance when forests and fields are cleared for well pads and pipelines.



The Plastic Treaty Instrument

The global plastics treaty is an instrument which presents us the opportunity to reduce plastic production, eradicate toxic substances in plastics, exclude false solutions like incineration, scale up zero waste solutions such as reuse, and center a just transition for waste pickers and other groups at the frontlines of the crisis.

We as the members of **Global Alliance for Incinerators Alternatives (GAIA) Network and Break Free From Plastics (BFFP) Movement** in Nigeria call on the Federal Ministries of Environment; **Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) Focal Points of Nigeria, National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) and other environmental agencies to:**

- Strongly align with the ambitious positions of the **BFFP movement/ GAIA Network** to reduce the trade, production and use of plastics, limiting the presence of toxic chemicals in plastics, prohibiting dangerous practices such as open burning, incineration firing in coal-fired power plants and other waste-to-energy processes, co-processing in cement kilns, and chemical recycling.
- Adopt and implement a comprehensive Zero Waste Plan that addresses all forms of waste at source of generation and across all value chains.
- Uphold the UN human right resolution to a safe, clean and healthy environment that is toxic-free.
- Make efforts to ban all single use plastics and establish mechanisms for plastic withdrawal by industries, business centers and in households.
- Guarantee the inclusion, integration, just transition and accessibility of waste pickers and frontline communities into national waste management policies and the Global Plastics Treaty process.
- Implement and strengthen existing legislation on single-use plastics and other problematic and unnecessary plastic in Nigeria states.
- Recognise that waste management practices alone do not address the full lifecycle impacts of plastic, and that recycling is most useful where it displaces virgin plastic production, rather than plastifying products that were formerly made from natural materials (e.g. in textiles).
- Oppose false solutions such as biodegradable and compostable plastics, incineration, co-incineration and chemical recycling.
- Strengthen and scale up existing and new sustainable solutions within the country such as zero waste models and reuse systems.
- Oppose financial mechanisms that perpetuate exponential plastic production and provide a license to pollute, such as plastic credits, and that allow multinational firms to evade their legal, financial, and moral responsibility for the plastic crisis, while doing little or nothing to address the problem or to finance a just transition.
- Establish criteria for effective, environmentally sound extended producer responsibility (EPR) schemes led by governments and not by producers and polluters that are consistent with other (Multilateral Environmental Agreements) MEAs and have clear upstream targets inclusive of stakeholders across reuse and recycling sectors.



- Adopt scientific and traditional sound approaches and evidence based measures throughout the Global Plastic Treaty process.
- Foster support for the effective implementation of the treaty through new, additional, predictable and adequate finance, technology transfer that is environmentally sound and not outdated or being phased out, and capacity building across all sectors of the plastics value chain.

We reaffirm that addressing the plastics production reduction at source remains a fundamental part of the efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, build resilience and solutions to climate change while ensuring justice, and equity for all.

Reducing plastics usage in Nigeria will guarantee the true commitment from Nigeria government to the implementation of its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and reducing extractive activities that deliberately create environmental concerns. As we work toward achieving this goal, also note that breaking free from plastics will mark out the country for sustainable environmental advancement and promote the health of citizens in line with the UN sustainable development goals.

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