



Collaborations and synergies for sustaining the implementation of SWITCH-Asia Programme for a more impactful #WeSwitch focused on:

PLASTICS



7 July 2021 • 1500-1700 (Bangkok Time) • WEBEX

CONTEXT

Globally: Importance of plastics and resulting problems

Plastic is a material that has conquered the entire world. Due to its low cost, light weight, versatility and durability it enables numerous uses in different sectors. Plastic as convenience- and hygiene-enabling material also has a dark side: especially in the form of single-use items that are burned or discarded after an average of 30 seconds of use. Plastic has shown up in the form of waste and microplastics all over the world, endangering human health, biodiversity, and the ocean's ability to store carbon. Plastic particles can be found in the air, in water, soil, marine and land animals and even bees. More than 130 million metric tons of single-use plastics (SUP) were thrown away in 2019, mostly in the form of packaging. Packaging made of plastics is on an exponential growth trajectory, and due to its mismanagement, more than 10 million tons annually will be polluting oceans in the next years. Abandoned fishing gear made of plastic, synthetic clothing, household items and tyre abrasion add to the problem, and business-to-business packaging, for example in the textiles sector, has also grown. Currently, as little as 9 percent of plastic material is actually recycled. If they are not burnt, plastic products remain in the environment for decades and even centuries. As a material based on fossil oil and gas, the production and open burning and incineration of

plastics resulted in more than 0,89 gigaton of equivalent carbon dioxide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2019, more than the annual GHG emissions of Germany. SUP production is projected to grow by another 30% in the next 5 years, and if production and incineration trends continue, SUP may be causing up to 10% of the world's GHG emissions by 2050. These emission projections for the plastic lifecycle are far away from meeting the 1.5°C temperature target. Current trends cannot continue.

Plastics in Asia: Important Trends, Figures and Challenges

In Asia, SUP convenience products have reached everywhere, even remote rural areas. More than half of global SUP is produced in Asia, and Asian countries export a large part of their production. With 30% of global production, China is of particular importance. As an average of per capita consumption, plastic waste in many Asian countries is still quite low compared to the world's top consumers, including Australia and the United States. There is a visible link between a growing middle class and unsustainable consumption and production patterns, including plastics. In the majority of Asian countries, the waste collection systems and the recycling capacity is not able to cope with the amounts of plastic generated. The most highly challenged countries include China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam,

Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Myanmar. Some Asian countries, like Vietnam and Laos, are even importing plastic waste for “recycling”, when in fact, this waste often goes untreated. Malaysia and China have recently banned this practice.

What role for companies and governments in this challenge?

Currently, big corporations like Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Nestlé are major contributors to the plastics problem. According to brand audits on the ground in Asia, the top 10 polluting global brands are responsible for up to 50% of plastic waste found in cleanups, depending on the region. In Asia, local and regional brands, including for cosmetics and convenience food, are also continuously extending their use of plastics.

Regarding manufacturing, 20 large polymer producers, many of which are fossil companies like Exxon Mobile and SaudiAramco, are responsible for the majority of plastics production. As a carbon-based product, plastics actually adds revenue to oil productions’ waste and side products, making it very profitable. In the coming years, more than 100 new petrochemical plants will start production in Asia. Industry initiatives seek to “curb plastic waste”, funding clean-ups and waste collection initiatives worldwide. Yet, these activities often target “end-of-life” solutions rather than systemic interventions, with necessary actions upstream to reduce and control plastic waste generation. In addition, currently virgin plastic production is cheap and recycling often not economical. Voluntary commitments by brands to reduce plastics use have proven to be ineffective. Even a very high recycling rate would not solve the problems caused by plastics: recycling is done most frequently by mechanically disintegrating plastics’ polymer structure. This oftentimes comes at a loss of material quality, resulting in “downcycling”. This means, rather than enabling circular use, the use case of recycled plastics is limited and effectively increases plastics’ proliferation – for example in the form of carpets or “fast-fashion” textiles made of low-quality plastics. Industry players are known for their effective lobbying tactics, and regulation and transparency of the industry are globally low.

There are few governments that tackle the problem in a systemic way. Generally, the focus lies on singling out specific finished products, waiting for producer initiatives to become effective, and describing the urgency of the problem. Singular policies, like banning particular items or establishing deposit return system schemes or concepts like “extended producer responsibility” are on their own not enough to solve the multiple problems that plastics pose. In many countries, consumers are made to feel responsible for the proliferation of plastics, even when there is little choice for them. Of course, the industry lobbies that employment and tax revenues are endangered if legislative steps are taken to limit plastic use. But surprisingly, also countries that do not have their own plastics production facilities, and therefore import all plastic materials, are hesitant to act.

How can sustainable consumption and production (SCP) as a concept activate the necessary change?

Clearly, plastic production and consumption patterns and their growth trajectory are unsustainable. A systemic shift is required, and plastic use needs to be drastically limited to reduce environmental, human health and climate impacts. Comprehensive action that has proven effective for other

materials with detrimental side effects need to be adapted plastics– combining international commitments and enacting visible change, including through legislation and incentives, simultaneously for consumers and producers.

Plastic’s impact on the environment and human health are of relevance to seven SDGs (SDG 3, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15). These seven SDGs cover good health and wellbeing, sustainable management of water and sanitation; SCP; climate change; and sustainable use of land-based and marine ecosystems while ensuring their protection, restoration and conservation. The concept of SCP is helpful in analysing the system of the current plastic economy, and the necessary shift to less resource-intensive and polluting alternatives that allow for circularity. It allows simultaneously considering the importance of both transforming material development and the entire production side, as well as limiting its consumption and use cases.

Production Side

The production side needs to be addressed by measures at policy, economic and business level. All process steps of the plastics value chain need to be made transparent and governed by legislation, including product development, pellet production from oil and gas, further manufacturing, distribution and sales, the use phase (including reuse and recycling) and disposal or recycling. To achieve sustainable use, the goal must be to keep economic value within the system as long as possible, drastically reduce material footprint, avoid toxic or otherwise harmful substances – and to integrate full lifecycle costing into economic and business assessments. This could also be done as part of pricing carbon emissions.

This holistic approach to production is based on the understanding that the plastic problem is much more than a waste management issue, and, therefore, recycling is not the panacea. Many companies have already taken note of the changing tide with governments’ and consumers’ attitudes toward plastic and have committed to phasing out and material innovation.

A case in point for this is the “New Plastics Economy Global Commitment” launched by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation in 2021 – which advocates for a radical change in current practices. Among its 450 signatories worldwide, there are also several multinational corporations that seek to contribute, despite currently and previously profiting from plastics production. The main argument of the commitment is that a strong business case can just as effectively be made by a reduction of plastic use, as long as there is international commitment to the cause. The business case is strengthened by the endeavour to bring about an international agreement on plastics.

This agreement would target plastic production worldwide, limiting plastic uses and governing its value chain including waste management. The U.N. is seen as most effective anchor point for this, as it is already overseeing different types of hazardous chemicals and waste governed under the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions. By way of example, in force since January 2021, an amendment to the Basel Convention (Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal) seeks to strengthen the regulation of global trade in plastic waste to curb environmental pollution. Further, global negotiations for a binding agreement are possible in early 2022

as part of the United Nations Environmental Agenda 5 (UNEA5), which has garnered the support of more than seventy countries.

Consumption Side

In parallel and support to these actions at policy, economic and business level, raising consumer awareness is of high relevance. The global challenge that plastic already poses and its potential continuation and aggravation if not for systemic and behaviour change must be more clearly communicated by governments, environmental NGOs and companies pioneering alternatives. Many consumers are already aware of the downsides of plastic, and would prefer to be able to avoid it. In a survey by Eurobarometer of EU citizens, 87% of respondents admitted that they are worried about environmental impacts of plastics, while 94% of respondents stated that products should be designed in a way that eases recycling. This attitude is also observable in Asia: in a recent survey conducted by McKinsey, respondents from China, India, and Indonesia stated grave concerns about the environmental impact of packaging, and more than 70% of respondents were willing to pay considerably more for sustainable packaging. Sustainability should therefore become a key factor in strategic planning for packaging companies.

EU Strategy and Action on Plastic

With its 2019 flagship European Green Deal, the EU has renewed its commitment to a circular economy and strengthened this in its 2020 EU Circular Economy Action Plan. With regard to plastics specifically, the EU adopted a European Strategy For Plastics in January 2018. This builds on previous measures to reduce plastic waste, including making recycling profitable for business. Already in 2015, the EU committed to the goal that by 2030, plastic packaging must be recyclable or reusable in a cost-effective manner. Its Directive on Single-Use Plastics was

formally adopted in 2019. The most important aspects are the banning of specific single-use plastic items, the order to reduce others, strengthening of producer responsibility (including regarding collection) and labelling requirements.

Currently, EU legislation is one of the most ambitious globally. Other priorities of the EU include the curbing of microplastics, limiting marine pollution including fishing gear, and strengthening use of alternative materials and material circularity. The EU also seeks to drive innovation and investment and spurring global change. In its funded programmes, including Horizon 2020 and LIFE, the EU actively seeks solutions from multi-stakeholder consortia on circular economy research, development and practices, including plastics. The EU also actively promotes a global agreement on plastics, which was also highlighted in its Circular Economy Action Plan.

Outlook in Asia

In Asia, several commitments have signalled the awareness of Asian governments regarding plastic challenges. For example, the 2017 Indore “3R Declaration of Asian Mayors” seeks to ban the disposal of plastics in eco-sensitive or eco-fragile areas. Similarly, a “Bangkok 3R Declaration for prevention of plastic waste pollution through 3R and Circular Economy” in 2019 referred to the importance of building institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks to strengthen circularity. In addition, local and municipal governments have banned plastic bags (for example, New Delhi, 2012 / Islamabad, 2019) and The Republic of Maldives seeks to phase out SUP entirely by 2023. This is in line with new thinking on the topic, which seeks to establish local solutions to the global challenge – for example, the Zero Waste Cities approach which aims to shape a municipal system that is truly circular at local scale.

SWITCH-ASIA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO COUNTRIES AND SUPPORT TO GRANTS ON PLASTICS

The EU SWITCH-Asia Programme provides a platform for partnerships and networks between Europe and Asia, supporting the implementation of national strategies and action plans on SCP practices. With the assistance of the European Commission, Asian countries are supported to transition towards low-carbon, resource-efficient and more circular

economies that contribute to poverty reduction. This is done by technical assistance provided by the SCP Facility and the Regional Policy Advocacy Component at government-level, and through the Grants Programme in support of the regions’ SCP-relevant entrepreneurs and SMEs.

SWITCH-Asia is currently providing Technical Assistance focused on plastics to the following countries:

COUNTRY PROJECT TITLE	OBJECTIVES
LAO PDR (July 2020 – September 2021)	Preparation of a policy analysis report addressing the minimization, reduction and prevention of use of single-use plastics in selected priority sectors, considering the country’s specific circumstances and collaboration of work through the joint partnership initiative between the EU and the World Bank on developing a national plastic and waste management plan to ensure synergy of efforts
PAKISTAN (June 2020 – May 2021)	Raising awareness for waste management, in particular with regards to plastics, and providing guidance for a more efficient management, including minimisation and prevention approaches. Assessing the impact of the plastics bags ban and developing policy recommendations.

COUNTRY PROJECT TITLE	OBJECTIVES
MALDIVES (April 2021 – December 2021)	Develop sustainable waste management policies and tools for minimizing and preventing SUP and improving circularity of plastics in the tourism sector that are in line with SCP and circular economy policies in the Maldivian context; supporting the Maldives SUP phase-out plan through working with stakeholders and providing technical expertise

Ongoing and recently completed SWITCH-Asia Grant Projects on plastics and their objectives:

GRANT PROJECTS	OBJECTIVES
PROMISE India, Maldives, Sri Lanka <i>ONGOING - 2020 -2024</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To reduce marine littering in tourism clusters along the Lakshadweep shorelines of the Maldives, Sri Lanka and India; Enhance the attractiveness of tourism industries and improve people's living conditions.
Prevent Plastics Myanmar <i>ONGOING - 2020 - 2024</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase availability of eco-friendly packaging and adopt sustainable management; To increase consumer awareness on plastics.
Sustainable Plastic Recycling Mongolia <i>ONGOING - 2020 - 2024</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support MSMEs in adopting SCP practices; Facilitate sustainable supply chain management with regard to plastic waste materials; Raise consumer awareness of SCP and plastics.
Protoprint India <i>ONGOING - 2020 - 2024</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved plastic recycling rates resulting in less littering / land-fill disposal which in-turn results in improved environmental, climate and human health outcomes; Formalisation of the recycling sector allowing for more transparency and innovation leading to greater efficiencies.
Luang Prabang Handle with Care Lao PDR <i>COMPLETED - 2016 - 2019</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building the capacity of business membership organisations (BMOs), entrepreneurs and employees in the tourism sector and relevant government officials to develop sustainable products; Supporting simple solutions such natural bamboo straws, refillable bottles and refill stations as well as organic packaging.

SWITCH-Asia has worked on the topic of plastics in multiple ways. SWITCH-Asia grant projects provide innovative recycling technologies as well as material alternatives to plastics and also seek to promote changing consumer behaviour. The technical assignments to the governments of Laos, Pakistan and Maldives focus on analysing the situation, bringing together the issue's stakeholders, and developing policy recommendations.

INTERNAL THEMATIC MEETING

As result of the SWITCH-Asia Programme Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting held in December 2020, a series of **"Internal thematic cluster consultative and brainstorming meetings"** is now well inscribed in the programme as part of SWITCH-Asia activities 2021-mid-2022 and through joint efforts with partner countries and key organisations in the region.

Objective

The objective of the consultation meeting on plastics is to strengthen cooperation through the three SWITCH-Asia components (SCP Facility, Grants programme and Regional Policy Advocacy Component (RPAC)), involving the Country EU Delegations (EUDs), the National Focal Points (NFPs) of partner countries' Ministries, Grant projects, and selected regional/international partners, to ensure an active exchange of experiences and ideas for creating larger impact.

Output

Hosted by the SCP Facility, the meeting is designed to achieve the following:

- Increased understanding of Asian countries' diversity and shared priorities regarding plastics, as well as relevance of EU initiatives on plastics for the region;
- Exchanging experiences among Asian and European experts on how policy-making, consumer awareness and private sector efforts are needed for systemic changes;
- Informing stakeholders of the SWITCH-Asia programme's learning experiences and achievements on plastics;
- Building the understanding and laying basis for initiating partnerships with participants;
- Prepare a high-level SWITCH-Asia SCP Facility event on plastics planned for beginning of 2022;

- Flagging of important issues for consideration by the EU for the next programming phase and for potential collaboration with other organisations.

Guideline for Discussion

1. What are the main challenges and opportunities for replicating and scaling-up SCP practices through the Grant Projects at national and regional levels?
2. What are good practices to overcome challenges? How does the pandemic and resulting economic impacts contribute to the challenges? What can grant projects, EU Delegations or the SCP Facility contribute?
3. What can the SWITCH-Asia programme components do to better reflect this topics' importance and urgency? How to improve and consolidate synergies between the entire programme (all three components) and other organisations and stakeholders?
4. How can potential synergies/partnerships be formed to mutually support and provide greater impact focused on plastics?

Identification of important issues and possible areas for learning and cooperation

Governance issues:

- Local, national and regional issues and problem-solving strategies for facing the plastics challenge;
- Role of governments in shaping business decisions around plastic use; importance of holistic strategies that integrate long-term social and environmental considerations;
- Role of private sector and how a combination of legislation and market-based instruments and financing can transform the plastics economy;
- Connecting plastic issues with national social / environmental goals, and those set forth in SDGs, New Urban Agenda, and Paris Agreement;

The meeting will focus on the SWITCH-Asia achievements in promoting SCP in the plastics sector through SME-focused grants and technical assistance provided to countries. The discussion will be on the role of stakeholders on how to scale up success stories from grants and support initiatives to foster innovative solutions and to address challenges including the current COVID-19 pandemic.

PROGRAMME

15:00 (CET+5)	Welcome Remarks
15:05	Challenges and opportunities (EU) Presentation of major challenges in Asia and opportunities for action (UN)
15:25	Sharing of experiences from assignments and grant projects (4 contributions)
16:00	<i>Moderated Roundtable</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can a transformative, systemic shift on plastics be propelled, and what role for consumers, policy-makers and business? 2. What are the main challenges and opportunities for replicating and scaling-up SCP practices on plastics? What can grant projects, EU Delegations or the SCP Facility contribute? 3. What needs to be done at international, national and local/urban levels so that the plastic challenge can be solved? 4. What can the SWITCH-Asia programme do to better reflect this topics' importance and urgency?
16:40	Main outcomes and conclusion
17:00	Summary and outlook

"Technical" sustainability issues:

- Material innovations that replace or reduce plastics use;
- Sustainable design and circularity-enabling technology and systems;
- Value-chain interventions that enable use of alternatives to plastics, for example in the food and beverage sector.

Challenges

- Difficulty of "solving" plastics problem as it is closely connected to and resulting from numerous issues, including governance structures and governmental priorities; economic growth / employment; private / corporate actors and lobbying; financing; etc.
- Need to rethinking plastics and take holistic view on consumption shaped by policy-making on various levels (local / municipal and national) e.g., with regard to food value chains, convenience, etc.
- Need to consider the entire plastic cycle, from upstream with the use of new materials and innovative design to downstream supporting the recycling sector.
- The impact on plastics issues by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath.

Opportunities for collaboration and shared experience to guide the discussions

- Producer perspective
- Consumer perspective
- Systems perspective
- Policy-level considerations

Regulations/guidelines/documents on plastics include:

- [EU Green Deal](#)
- [EU Circular Economy Action Plan](#)
- [EU Plastics Strategy](#)
- [European Strategy for Plastics in a Circular Economy](#)
- [EU Circular Plastics Alliance](#)
- [Directive on single-use plastics](#)
- [Packaging Directive](#)
- [Plastic Bags Directive](#)
- [Basel Convention: Amendment: Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal](#)

Proposed Attendees of the Meeting:

Project Managers of Country EU Delegations (EUDs), EU INTPA, National Focal Points (NFPs) within Ministry of partner countries together with SWITCH-Asia implementing Ministry in case different, SCPF and its consortium members, RPAC, concerned Grant projects, and selected potential partners.

Potential Supporting Partners for future activities:

Ellen Mc Arthur Foundation, ICLEI, Parley for the Oceans, Rethink Plastic Alliance, UNEP Marine Litter Programme, UN ESCAP, 10 YFP - One Planet Network-Wide Plastics Initiative.

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