

**Dear SWITCH-Asia stakeholder,**

The SWITCH-Asia “Open Letter on plastics” is still open for signatures! The open letter shall contribute to the process initiated by a historic resolution at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi in March, which decided to bring an international legally binding agreement on plastics pollution under way by 2024.

We have selected the most important topics and arguments regarding plastics pollution in Asia in two workshops open to current SWITCH-Asia implementation organisations and governments in February and May 2022.

**You can sign as an individual with your organisational affiliation, or as an organisation.** If all partners agree, you can also sign the letter as a project.

More than 20 organisations and six projects have already signed.

Our aim is to generate interest in the process, publish Asian perspectives, share knowledge on the topic as well as increase momentum around solution-finding together with a wider group of SWITCH-Asia partners and stakeholders.

**To sign the letter, fill-in this [form](#)**

Yours sincerely,

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Implemented by GIZ, adelphi, IGES

# We need to work together to ensure that under the future agreement:

In short, low-carbon, sustainable, and circular economy approaches need to take centre stage at the End Plastic Pollution negotiations.

**Financing schemes** from national and international actors are set up to initiate and accelerate the transformation towards circularity and ensure the sustainability and continuity of actions.

Improved financial viability and new economic opportunities of **circular economy approaches** are showcased as part of policy framework interventions. Knowledge on standardisation and certification is shared to engage private sector actors, including SMEs.

Market interventions that incentivize the use of **plastic alternatives and recycling**, including a strengthened market for secondary materials, are being promoted. Policy measures and standards to limit the linear use of plastics are endorsed.



# Open Letter on the international legally binding agreement to end plastic pollution

## A contribution by SWITCH-Asia stakeholders

Context: On March 2 2022, Heads of State, Ministers of environment and other representatives from UN Member States endorsed a historic resolution at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi to End Plastic Pollution and forge an international legally binding agreement by 2024. The resolution addresses the full lifecycle of plastic, including its design, production, use and end-of life.

The following letter was drafted on the basis of a policy and expert documents review and in consultations with SWITCH-Asia stakeholders.

The first input has been obtained during an interactive workshop on February 23, 2022, hosted by the SWITCH-Asia SCP Facility for SWITCH-Asia grant implementation organisations from Central Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia, and East-Asia. The letter was further discussed and commented on in a joint workshop of grant implementation organisations and government representatives on May 18, 2022.

It will be open for signatures by individuals and organisational stakeholders, and government institutions.

## Background

- Plastic pollution is an ever faster growing problem that needs to be tackled urgently. Grave environmental impacts resulting from plastics and plastics pollution are undeniable, on land, in water, and in the oceans, and bear the risk of affecting human health and livelihoods.
- There is a multitude of promising efforts that have been taken by various stakeholders, including governments, civil society, industry, and science. These efforts need to be empowered and built on further, to bring about the much-needed transformation in the way that plastic is produced, used, and utilised further, including through circular economy approaches.
- Therefore, it is of great importance that states at UNEA have decided on a far-reaching and encompassing mandate for negotiations on a Global Agreement to end plastic pollution.

## However, the signatories of this letter recognise that the real work of designing an effective and efficient global agreement begins with the international negotiation committee (INC) in November 2022.

- In the coming years, in the five meetings of the INC, governments, civil society and industry will design and decide on a robust institutional framework to promote a life-cycle and circular approach for plastic products and to ensure that society at large can benefit from this transformational change.
- While the negotiations take place, it must not be forgotten that implementation of innovative solutions and policies against plastic pollution needs to continue now and to be scaled-up to counter the current growth trajectory of plastic production and mismanaged plastic waste.
- In order for the global plastics agreement to be truly encompassing, it will need to be applicable to different regional and national circumstances regarding contributors, causes and consequences of plastic pollution. Solutions to the current challenges will have to reflect this diversity and the agreement will need to find a balance between being firm in its goals but flexible in its means.

## The perspective from SWITCH-Asia partner countries and SWITCH-Asia stakeholders

- The signatories represent a diverse group of Asian organisations and representatives working primarily with the SWITCH-Asia programme. They call for policy-makers across the globe to recognise the different regional and national circumstances of these countries as well as shared concerns and hopes for an effective global agreement, which would reduce the impact of plastics on the environment and societies.

## Asian countries are diverse when it comes to plastic pollution.

- Asian countries' geography ranges from island states to land-rimmed countries and can be of low elevation or mountainous, vast or small. In some countries, densely populated urban areas are where the majority

of the population lives while in other countries rural communities prevail. Economic development is highly unequal.

- Contributions and sufferings from plastic pollution, related challenges and possible solutions vary greatly. Much of marine plastic pollution stems from land-based sources, rivers and shorelines in Asia. In some countries, production and consumption levels of plastics are immense. In others, production facilities do not exist, but consumption is on the rise, limiting the influence on the design stage of plastics. Some countries accept plastic waste from other countries, which often challenges recycling systems and leads to conflicting policies.
- Waste management capacities and degree of waste infrastructure development differ. Informal sector workers contribute to collection and sorting of waste in different ways. This often leads to unsafe working conditions that need improvement.
- In some countries, policies and regulation against plastic pollution already exist, in other countries, policies and regulations are missing. Where policies and regulation exist, enforcement can be a challenge. Countries also differ in aligning waste management policies with industrial, innovation and other relevant policies.

## **Despite all these differences between Asian countries, there are several issues that all face together in this region and in the rest of the world:**

### **Systemic challenges**

- **Need for material circularity:** Plastics is a useful material if leakages from the production and consumption systems are prevented (i.e., if plastics is re-used and recycled) and more sustainable materials are used. Single-use plastic products are uniquely detrimental to the environment and human health, yet, they continue replacing less harmful material alternatives in many countries.
- **Lack of market regulation:** There are challenges in developing markets for secondary materials based on plastics due to absence of circular approaches to plastics, limited innovations, and lacking regulations and standards.
- **Lack of awareness of the general public:** Not all parts of the population are equally aware of the causes and effects of plastic pollution. Neither are they equally aware of how their behaviour contributes to the problem or to future solutions and how they can change it.
- **No “One-Size-Fits-All” approach:** there are unclear roles and responsibilities regarding plastics and plastic pollution. Approaches from other countries and regions may not be applicable in SWITCH-Asia partner countries as the waste management systems of most lack source-segregation and separate collection standards or targets.
- **Institutional level of responsibility:** it is often unclear where and how to tackle plastics pollution, on which level an intervention must be initiated (global, national, regional, local), which objectives to set, which policy instruments to use and which actors to target.

### **Knowledge, data and innovation**

- **Lack of data and monitoring:** contributors, causes and consequences of plastic pollution, including microplastics, as well as on the amount of plastic waste leaking into the environment are not transparent. Knowledge gaps also exist regarding the effects of plastic use and plastic additives on human health, as well as regarding alternatives to plastics.
- **Research and analysis are needed regarding the effect of different policy options to prevent plastic pollution.**
- **Where data and monitoring exist, methodologies need to be harmonised to make them comparable.** Reporting frameworks for plastic products would improve transparency of production and pollution levels.
- **Innovation systems and technical innovations are required for developing products or services as part of a circular value chain.** These need to be adapted to be relevant to the diverse markets and customer segments in Asia.
- **Lack of data and knowledge should not be a reason for inaction:** While it is important to close these gaps and build capacity, it is urgently required to curb plastic pollution, improve circularity and target innovation at all lifecycle stages.

## Economics and industry

- Projections of economic development for SWITCH-Asia partner countries are high. In past decades, economic growth was tied to growing consumption of plastic products. As capacities and infrastructure to recycle plastic waste are not being built up sufficiently, this correlation is harmful and needs to be broken.
- Economics of plastics and recycling need to change: recycled materials cannot compete with virgin plastics, as long as the latter's external costs (e.g., to the environment or climate) are not internalised or plastics are subsidised through oil and gas subsidies.
- While waste collection and recycling need to be increased and improved, actions in these areas can only be feasible and successful if the production of virgin plastics is also curbed. Product manufacturers and consumers often have limited influence on material choices further upstream. Alternative materials are often priced out by cheap virgin plastics.
- Industry, in particular the upstream sector, including fossil fuel companies, is a powerful player and needs to be engaged towards embracing transformational change. Solutions need to be adapted to local contexts and scaled-up. Piloting is not enough in the face of the challenges that plastics pose to human health and the environment.
- It is important to distinguish upstream industry actors: they all need to contribute to the implementation of the agreement, but their contributions will be diverse, with many of them in need of new technologies and / or business models.

## Call for action

For these reasons, we need to work together to ensure that under the future agreement:

- All stakeholders are involved in continuous work on the agreement and in shaping it further, sharing responsibilities to curb plastic pollution.
- Different national circumstances are considered and accounted for and knowledge sharing and innovation are promoted, e.g., by open-source platforms, targeted capacity building, and innovation systems.
- Sharing of technologies and innovations in materials and production processes among stakeholders and countries is encouraged. This includes local solutions and traditional knowledge and practices that are plastics-free.
- Producers and actors across the entire value chain/life cycle of plastics are held accountable, and receive clear political direction. Plastic-producing companies and the fossil fuel industry need to be engaged as contributors to minimise plastic waste. Upstream measures need to be in focus, thereby considerably reducing the need for downstream measures.
- Market interventions that incentivize the use of plastic alternatives and recycling, including a strengthened market for secondary materials, are being promoted. Policy measures and standards to limit the linear use of plastics are endorsed.
- Improved financial viability and new economic opportunities of circular economy approaches are showcased as part of policy framework interventions. Knowledge on standardisation and certification is shared to engage private sector actors, including SMEs.
- Financing schemes from national and international actors are set up to initiate and accelerate the transformation towards circularity and ensure the sustainability and continuity of actions.
- **In short, low-carbon, sustainable, and circular economy approaches need to take centre stage at the End Plastic Pollution negotiations.**