

Plastic, Policies and People

A Bottom-Up Dialogue on
the Global Plastics Treaty



CAG

Citizen consumer and civic Action Group

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About CAG:

CAG is a 39-year-old non-profit and non-political organisation that works towards protecting citizens’ rights in consumer, civic and environmental issues and promoting good governance processes, including transparency, accountability and participatory decision-making.



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We sincerely thank each stakeholder group for their enthusiastic and insightful participation:

- **Youth participants** shared bold ideas and expressed a strong desire to lead change, offering creative and constructive solutions rooted in advocacy, education, and action.
- **Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs)** provided valuable community-level perspectives on local plastic use, waste segregation, and citizen engagement, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities of neighbourhood-level action.
- **Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** contributed detailed inputs on the economic realities of transitioning to sustainable alternatives and offered practical suggestions on innovation, incentives, and regulatory clarity.
- **Informal waste workers** shared powerful testimonies of their experiences managing waste and called for greater recognition and inclusion within future policy frameworks.
- **Conservancy workers** brought to light the essential, often invisible labour that underpins urban sanitation systems, emphasising the need for just working conditions and secure livelihoods in a post-plastic economy.

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Executive Summary

As the world moves toward negotiating a historic Global Plastics Treaty, the voices of those most affected by plastic pollution—workers, residents, entrepreneurs, and youth must not be left behind. This report captures the lived experiences, hopes, and demands of communities on the frontlines of plastic use and waste management, gathered through a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) across four major Indian cities: Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai. The discussions brought together diverse stakeholders, youth advocates, Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), informal waste workers, and conservancy workers. While the levels of awareness about the treaty varied, participants across all groups and locations quickly connected with its goals. They shared clear views on what must change and what support they need to be part of the solution.

A central theme across all discussions was the urgent need to reduce plastic production at its source. Stakeholders expressed strong support for legally binding limits on virgin plastic, especially single-use and non-recyclable types. However, they stressed that these reductions must be accompanied by meaningful and non-toxic alternatives and economic safeguards, especially for those whose livelihoods depend on plastic value chains.

Health risks from hazardous chemicals in plastics were particularly evident among frontline waste workers. Daily exposure to unsegregated, toxic waste was described as a routine danger, leading to chronic illness and injuries. There was a clear call for stronger chemical regulation, labelling requirements, and safer working conditions.

Transparency and accountability were widely emphasised. RWAs and youth advocated for public-facing data systems to monitor plastic flows and corporate responsibility. Waste workers, whose contributions often go undocumented, requested tools to track and formalise their role in the recovery economy. Stakeholders also urged that the treaty be enforceable across borders and industries. Fragmented local bans and voluntary corporate actions were seen as ineffective. Participants called for consistent global rules that apply throughout the lifecycle of plastic, from extraction, production, and design, to end-of-life disposal.

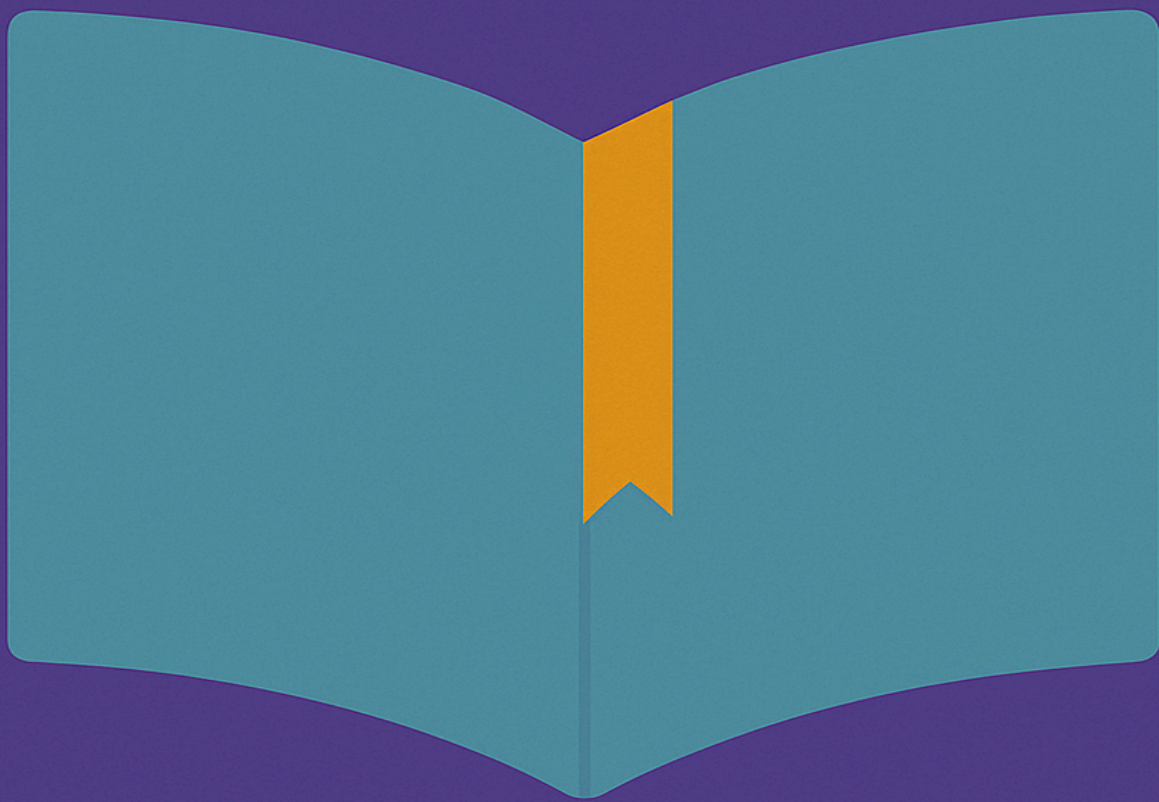
Equally critical was the demand for real investment. MSMEs spoke of financial and technical barriers in transitioning to sustainable alternatives. RWAs and youth groups highlighted the lack of funding for local action. Informal and conservancy workers asked for basic protections: equipment, healthcare, wages, and respect. All stakeholders agreed that funding must be accessible, fair, and tied to clear implementation goals.

The clearest message, however, was that no transition can be truly sustainable unless it is also just. Informal waste workers and conservancy staff called for recognition, inclusion, and protection. They asked not just to be consulted, but to be counted. Youth and RWAs echoed this

demand, stressing that a people-centred treaty must elevate the voices and rights of those most impacted by plastic pollution.

In summary, the FGDs revealed a clear mandate from local stakeholders: the Global Plastics Treaty must be bold, enforceable, and grounded in equity. It must do more than regulate, it must empower. The voices represented in this report call on policymakers to match ambition with accountability and to design a treaty that works not only for the planet but for the people who protect it every day.

Introduction



1. Introduction

Plastic pollution is an escalating global crisis that affects ecosystems, human health, and economies. From packaging and clothing to consumer goods and industrial use, its uncontrolled production, consumption, and disposal have led to severe environmental and social consequences. Microplastics have been detected in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and even in human blood and organs. This crisis is no longer abstract.

Recognising the urgent need for global cooperation, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) adopted Resolution 5/14 in March 2022, which laid the foundation for the development of a Global Plastics Treaty (GPT). This landmark resolution committed over 175 countries to negotiate an international legally binding instrument to end plastic pollution, taking into account the full life cycle of plastics, from extraction to production to disposal. The treaty is being negotiated through a series of Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) meetings, with the fifth and final session scheduled for August 2025 in Geneva, Switzerland.

While the treaty process marks a significant global milestone, it is essential that the solutions being proposed are grounded in the realities of those who experience the impacts of plastic pollution firsthand or are actively involved in addressing it. Informal waste workers, conservancy workers, youth, residential welfare associations (RWAs), and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) working on alternatives to plastics are vital yet underrepresented stakeholders in these conversations. These groups not only suffer disproportionately from the adverse effects of plastic pollution but also contribute significantly to local waste management and sustainable innovation.

To ensure these critical voices are included, Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) organised a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). These FGDs were conducted in four major cities, Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, with the objective of capturing grounded, lived experiences and gathering practical insights and policy recommendations. These cities were chosen for their demographic diversity, varying degrees of urbanisation, and differing waste management contexts.

The FGDs aimed to:

- Document the lived experiences of communities and workers directly dealing with plastic waste.
- Understand the challenges and opportunities associated with plastic use, reuse, and waste reduction.
- Generate practical recommendations for treaty negotiators that reflect ground realities.
- Promote inclusive policy development through bottom-up engagement.

This report synthesises the outcomes of these FGDs, providing a lens into the challenges, aspirations, and policy demands of those who often remain on the fringes of international environmental negotiations.

METHODOLOGY



2. Methodology

The Focus Group Discussions were designed as participatory sessions aimed at surfacing insights from diverse local stakeholders whose voices are often marginalised in international policy processes. The FGDs were conducted in four urban centres: Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai. These cities were strategically selected to ensure geographical diversity, representing different socio-economic, cultural, and governance landscapes. Each urban centre offered a unique set of dynamics related to plastic production, consumption, and waste management, thus enriching the data collected.

Stakeholder Groups

Each FGD included participants from the following **five key stakeholder categories**:

1. **Youth leaders** from colleges and civil society organisations engaged in environmental activism and local action.
2. **Representatives of RWAs**, reflecting the perspectives of urban residential communities managing waste at the household level.
3. **MSMEs** involved in developing or promoting reusable products and alternatives to single-use plastics.
4. **Conservancy workers** employed by municipal bodies or private contractors to manage daily solid waste.
5. **Informal waste workers**, many of whom rely on the collection and sale of plastic waste for their livelihoods.

Approximately 10 participants were selected for each stakeholder group in each city. Participants were identified through a combination of local networks, partner organisations, and direct outreach, with an emphasis on ensuring gender representation, socio-economic diversity, and experiential relevance.

Session Format and Facilitation

Each FGD followed a structured agenda comprising:

- A brief introductory video and explanation of the Global Plastics Treaty to set the context.
- Facilitated group discussions lasting 2-3 hours, moderated by trained facilitators
- Thematic discussion blocks focusing on:
 - Challenges and risks experienced in relation to plastic use and pollution
 - Existing practices and local innovations for reduction and reuse

- Barriers to adopting alternatives to plastic
- Recommendations for policy and treaty negotiators

Sessions were conducted in **local languages** where necessary, with facilitators skilled in translating between English and the regional language to ensure clarity and comfort for all participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

All FGDs were:

- **Audio recorded** (with informed consent from participants)
- Supplemented with **field notes**, observation records, and group summaries prepared by facilitators

The data was later transcribed and coded using a thematic analysis framework to identify recurring patterns, unique insights, and actionable recommendations across each city. This qualitative approach enabled a deeper understanding of context-specific issues while also capturing cross-cutting themes relevant across geographies.

This report integrates these insights to inform advocacy and engagement efforts with treaty negotiators, policymakers, and global stakeholders, highlighting the urgency of a bottom-up, inclusive approach to ending plastic pollution.

DISCUSSION GUIDE



3. Discussion Guide

The focus group discussions (FGDs) were structured to gather grounded, community-informed insights on the Global Plastics Treaty, its perceived implications, and how stakeholders envision their role in addressing plastic pollution. This section outlines the approach, thematic alignment, and framing strategy used to ensure comprehensive and meaningful engagement with diverse participant groups.

Thematic Anchors

Discussion questions were designed around six core priority areas outlined for an effective Global Plastics Treaty:

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source
2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals
3. Mandatory Transparency and Reporting
4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle
5. Financing and Implementation Support
6. Ensuring a Just Transition for Affected Communities

These priorities provided the overarching framework for stakeholder engagement and informed the design of both general and group-specific discussion topics.

Participant Groups & Tailored Focus Areas

The FGDs were conducted across five key stakeholder groups, each with a unique relationship to plastic use and waste:

1. Youth

Youth discussions focused on awareness, perceptions of responsibility, personal and community actions, and their potential as change agents. Questions emphasised:

- Understanding of the treaty and its relevance.
- Role of youth in advocacy and behaviour change.
- Support needed to lead or join awareness initiatives.

2. Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs)

Discussions with RWAs focused on community-level plastic management and the capacity of resident groups to drive change. Key areas included:

- Plastic pollution's impact on local environments.
- Feasibility of behaviour change at the community level.

- Role of RWAs in education, coordination, and collaboration.

3. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)

FGDs with MSMEs explored how the treaty might influence business operations and the market for plastic alternatives. Discussions covered:

- Opportunities and risks linked to policy changes.
- Financial and technical barriers to adoption of alternatives.
- Partnerships and policy support needs for sustainable transitions.

4. Informal Waste Workers

This group brought vital frontline perspectives on plastic collection and recycling. The discussion emphasised:

- Contributions to plastic waste management.
- Challenges faced in current practices.
- Concerns and support needs regarding policy shifts and livelihood impacts.

5. Conservancy Workers

Conversations with conservancy workers focused on occupational health, role in the waste chain, and implications of the treaty. Topics included:

- Work-related exposure and challenges.
- Desire for inclusion in decision-making processes.
- Hopes for improved recognition and working conditions.

Question Design

Each discussion group received a tailored questionnaire, marked with priority questions to guide facilitators. Flexibility was maintained to allow facilitators to adapt based on group dynamics and relevance. Open-ended questions encouraged storytelling, critical thinking, and policy imagination, while follow-up prompts deepened engagement with the treaty's core themes.

Facilitation Strategy

- **Inclusive Language:** Questions were framed in accessible language for participants with diverse literacy levels and knowledge of global policy.
- **Context Sensitivity:** Facilitators adjusted the depth and focus of questions to suit the local context and cultural dynamics of each group.
- **Participant Empowerment:** Discussions prioritised listening and validation, particularly for underrepresented voices like informal workers.

KEY FINDINGS



4. Key Findings

This section presents the findings that are grounded in a series of FGDs conducted in four major Indian cities: Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, each representing distinct regional, economic, and cultural contexts. These discussions brought together five key stakeholder groups whose voices are central to shaping an effective and inclusive Global Plastics Treaty. Each group offered unique perspectives shaped by their roles in plastic consumption, waste management, policy enforcement, or community advocacy.

To ensure a structured and comparative analysis, the findings are organised city-wise and mapped to the six priority points that frame the proposed Global Plastics Treaty: reducing plastic production at source; eliminating hazardous chemicals; ensuring transparent reporting; establishing globally binding rules across the lifecycle; securing financing for real implementation; and enabling a just transition for affected communities. This framework not only anchors the discussions in policy relevance but also allows for a systematic understanding of how the same treaty priorities are perceived and interpreted differently across local realities.

The city-wise breakdown helps illuminate patterns of shared concern, such as the need for producer responsibility, formal recognition of waste workers, and the demand for stable funding, as well as site-specific insights that reflect contextual barriers, opportunities, and policy blind spots. Taken together, these findings surface the practical, emotional, and systemic dimensions of plastic governance as experienced from the ground up. They offer a vital counterpoint to top-down policy approaches and make a compelling case for integrating local knowledge and justice-based frameworks into global environmental negotiations.

CHENNAI



Youth

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Chennai's youth, while largely unfamiliar with the treaty initially, quickly aligned with its objectives once introduced. They voiced strong support for banning unnecessary packaging, especially in urban grocery chains and online deliveries, and proposed audits in colleges and hostels to track plastic usage.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Participants were concerned about the quality of plastic used in roadside food packaging and everyday containers. They emphasised the need for rules on what types of plastics are permissible in food contact applications and details about the chemicals present in these plastics.

3. Measuring What We Manage

Youth proposed school-based awareness dashboards and campaigns that track community-level waste. They believed that community visibility into plastic metrics could drive behaviour change.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They expressed frustration with fragmented policy enforcement in the city and viewed global rules as essential to pushing both governments and corporations to act consistently.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Many young participants suggested financing youth-led initiatives like awareness campaigns, start-ups for alternative materials, and community waste challenges. They proposed incentives such as green grants and fellowships.

6. Just Transition

Chennai youth showed deep concern for sanitation and informal workers. They suggested collaborative projects—like art exhibitions, cleanup drives, and storytelling campaigns—that humanise the worker experience and foster respect.

"Most of us believe everyone is responsible - the government, business, and people. But if we don't push, nothing will change. Youth must lead that push." - Youth Participant, Chennai

Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs)

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

RWAs noted that, despite bans, plastic remains ubiquitous in the form of home delivery and packaging. They supported bulk purchasing systems and retailer regulations that discourage over-packaging.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

There was low awareness of chemical hazards, but RWAs were alarmed by open dumping and burning and the suspected hazardous emissions from these. They called for guidance on identifying and segregating such materials.

3. Measuring What We Manage

RWAs showed a willingness to adopt digital logging tools or monthly surveys of household waste. However, they stressed the need for municipal training sessions and integration with official platforms.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They viewed the treaty as a mechanism that could force international brands and e-commerce giants to comply with packaging norms. RWAs sought clear directives and consistency in policy communication.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Associations demanded co-financing for composting units, plastic segregation bins, and cleaner collection infrastructure. Some cited pilot projects that failed due to lack of follow-up funding.

6. Just Transition

RWAs expressed strong support for employing informal workers as community waste monitors, provided there was institutional backing and a protocol for payment and supervision.

"Sustainable alternatives like banana leaf wraps are good, but they're not affordable or easily available. Plastic is everywhere because it's cheap and accessible. Change needs more than awareness." - RWA Member, Chennai

MSMEs

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

MSMEs in Chennai were cautious but not resistant to plastic phase-outs. Many favoured product-specific timelines to phase down plastics, particularly for packaging in small consumer goods.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Some MSMEs producing food containers expressed concern about meeting both domestic and export standards, if specific chemicals were to be banned. They urged alignment between treaty mandates and national food safety codes.

3. Measuring What We Manage

Most small enterprises lacked reporting systems and were worried about added compliance burden. However, they welcomed mobile-based reporting templates that could be auto-generated from procurement logs.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

The global treaty was viewed as a useful lever to push suppliers and raw material providers to comply with cleaner production norms. It was seen as a method to raise standards across the supply chain.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

MSMEs were vocal about the lack of support when plastic bans were previously introduced. They called for bridge financing, raw material subsidies, and training programs for eco-certifications.

6. Just Transition

MSMEs were especially concerned about contract and informal workers, who would be the first to be laid off if product lines change. They called for employment guarantee schemes, training in biodegradable material handling, and placement networks.

"Eco-friendly products are still a luxury. Rich hotels use biodegradable packaging, but roadside shops can't afford it. We need support to make these alternatives accessible for all, not just the privileged." - MSME Representative, Chennai

Informal Waste Workers

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Informal waste workers said they observed a temporary drop in plastic collection after bans, but waste soon returned in different forms. They proposed identifying alternative streams, like textiles, to replace income from plastic.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Workers shared that many health issues, especially skin, respiratory, and infections, stem from mixing biomedical and chemical-contaminated plastics in public bins. They asked for dedicated collection zones and personal protective kits.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They were open to documenting daily plastic collection if such logs helped access support. However, they emphasised that systems should not be individual-based but cooperative-led, to avoid exclusion.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

Although unaware of the treaty itself, they supported the idea of multinational companies being held accountable for harmful packaging. Some referred to specific brands that package in low-value, unrecyclable plastics.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Top demands included subsidised healthcare, children's education, secure work zones, and tools like weighing scales and pushcarts. They also requested payments tied to volume rather than middleman-negotiated rates.

6. Just Transition

Participants strongly supported inclusion in formal jobs such as municipal sorting staff, dry waste centre operators, or school campaign aides. They also wanted basic dignity, uniforms, ID cards, grievance systems, and fair wages.

"If plastic is banned, we lose work. The government should give us training or another job; otherwise, what will our families do?" - Informal Waste Worker, Chennai

Conservancy Workers

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Conservancy workers observed that heavy rains and floods compound plastic-related blockages. They supported upstream reduction to reduce this burden, but asked what alternative jobs would be available if waste volumes drop significantly.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Reports of injuries and illnesses due to exposure to medical waste and rotting plastic were common. Participants requested masks, gloves, and structured training on waste differentiation.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They said their efforts were invisible despite working long hours. They requested recording systems, such as route-based monitoring, digital attendance, and supervisor verification, that link effort to recognition or bonus pay.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

The treaty was seen as beneficial only if it translated into real municipal improvements. They

stressed that policy must be made visible through local cleanliness, segregation, and equipment standards.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Lack of toilets, drinking water, and rest spaces during long shifts were major concerns. Workers requested direct budget allocations for their welfare, including housing support and health checkups.

6. Just Transition

Permanent contracts were the most repeated ask. Workers called for pathways into secure employment, social security, retirement support, and formal consultation channels during major policy shifts.

“We’ve heard of the treaty through our company. What we really need is a strict policy that stops plastic at the source and gives people like us proper support and awareness.” - Conservancy Worker, Chennai

DELHI



Youth

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Youth participants from Delhi expressed strong support for upstream controls, emphasising the role of corporations in over-producing plastic packaging. They believed production caps and restrictions on certain plastic types (e.g., multilayer packaging) would make a tangible impact.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Participants highlighted risks related to microplastics in food and water. They were concerned about the long-term health effects, advocating for clearer regulation on product safety and plastic composition.

3. Measuring What We Manage

Youth called out the lack of transparency in corporate sustainability efforts. They recommended standardised eco-labels and digital tools (like QR codes on packaging) that track plastic use and disposal.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

Participants emphasised the limitations of local policies and saw a global treaty as necessary to bring multinational corporations into compliance. They viewed global rules as critical to levelling the playing field.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

They advocated for financial penalties for polluters and incentives for plastic-free startups. Some proposed a "youth green fund" to support student-led environmental initiatives.

6. Just Transition

Delhi youth expressed solidarity with informal waste workers and advocated for their inclusion in the treaty process. They recommended skills training and co-managed waste sorting hubs.

"I imagine a future where we all use reusable bags, bottles, and containers. Our streets are cleaner, oceans are safer, and sustainability becomes our habit, not just a trend." - Youth Participant, Delhi

Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs)

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

RWAs were frustrated by recurring instances of banned plastics resurfacing in the market. They demanded stricter controls on manufacturers and vendors to curb distribution at the source.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Although less informed on chemical content, RWAs acknowledged that unregulated plastic waste being burned in residential neighbourhoods was a serious health hazard. They supported clean disposal alternatives.

3. Measuring What We Manage

RWAs expressed interest in waste tracking if supported by municipal tools. They suggested community-level audits and app-based logs of plastic collection.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They believed global alignment could help drive consistency at local levels and push corporations to standardise packaging across regions.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

RWAs cited a lack of financial assistance for decentralised waste management (e.g., composting units, segregated bins). They asked for grants or rebates tied to performance.

6. Just Transition

Some RWAs were open to integrating informal workers into door-to-door waste collection, provided there was training and official support from the municipality.

"People won't give up plastic unless it's made inconvenient. Bans are needed, but unless local bodies act, it's just words. Industries making single-use plastic must be stopped." - RWA Member, Delhi

MSMEs

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

MSMEs expressed concern over abrupt bans. They preferred phased regulation, where small units are given time and support to shift to alternative materials.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Awareness was low, but MSMEs showed interest in learning about chemical safety standards. They wanted access to testing services and compliance workshops.

3. Measuring What We Manage

Some MSMEs practised internal monitoring but were wary of mandatory disclosures. They proposed voluntary frameworks first, supported by incentives.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

MSMEs welcomed global norms that could help streamline compliance and avoid conflicting regional rules that hurt small businesses.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Financial access was a central concern. MSMEs wanted targeted subsidies, easier loan approvals for switching to sustainable inputs, and green procurement mandates.

6. Just Transition

They raised concerns about informal workers in small-scale units being affected by automation or production shifts. They asked for skilling and placement support.

"We're ready to shift to greener products, but it's not cheap. Subsidies and low-interest loans can help us transition. Otherwise, sustainability remains a luxury." - MSME Representative, Delhi

Informal Waste Workers

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Informal workers feared loss of income if plastic volumes dropped. They urged a gradual reduction, with concurrent investments in reuse and repair systems that could provide alternate jobs.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Exposure to toxic materials during sorting was a major concern. Many reported skin issues and respiratory illnesses. They demanded protective gear and education.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They supported group-based recordkeeping but lacked access to any tools or platforms. NGO partnerships were suggested as enablers for documenting collection volumes.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They didn't know of the treaty but supported "rules for big companies" that make plastic that is difficult to collect or recycle.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

They highlighted the absence of direct financial benefits despite being central to recycling. Suggestions included per-kg payments, health benefits, and tools like trolleys or gloves.

6. Just Transition

Formal recognition was a repeated ask. Workers wanted ID cards, access to municipal tenders, training in new roles (e.g., plastic-free logistics), and respect for their expertise.

"We didn't know about this Global Plastics Treaty. But we want training, support, and something to fall back on if plastic disappears. Our survival depends on it." - Informal Waste Worker, Delhi

Conservancy Workers

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Workers saw reduced plastic as a double-edged sword - less to clean up but also potentially fewer jobs. They asked for clarity on job roles if production drops.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Direct health threats from mixed and hazardous waste were widely reported. Workers demanded safety gear, and awareness on material types.

3. Measuring What We Manage

Conservancy workers said their work often goes unrecorded. They requested systems to log effort, such as supervisor validations or digital attendance tools.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They hoped for rules that ensured better local enforcement and reduced community-level pollution. The treaty was viewed as useful only if they felt the effects of it "on the ground."

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Lack of funding for worker welfare was a major issue. Requests included housing, sanitation at work sites, regular disbursement of salaries, and access to pension schemes.

6. Just Transition

The most common demand: stable jobs. Workers asked for permanent contracts, health insurance, and grievance redressal systems. Many hoped their children wouldn't need to take up similar jobs.

"If plastic goes, we need other recyclables to earn from. We should be included in decisions. Don't leave us behind while you plan a cleaner world." - Conservancy Worker, Delhi

KOLKATA



Youth

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Most participants were newly introduced to the treaty, but once informed, they strongly supported measures to reduce plastic production. They pointed to the excessive packaging in neighbourhood markets and advocated for regulations on manufacturers and retail suppliers.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Some participants expressed concern about thermocol packaging and chemically treated plastic containers used by food vendors. They called for restrictions on such items, especially in schools and street food zones.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They proposed community-based audits and school-led tracking systems to build awareness. Several mentioned that real-time data could improve accountability among both users and producers.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

The group felt that without global rules, national efforts would be inconsistent and ineffective. They believed international regulations could enforce change among major brands and harmonise implementation across cities.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Kolkata youth highlighted the need for public campaigns funded by government bodies. They recommended that funds from plastic taxes be redirected into youth awareness programs and sustainability clubs in educational institutions.

6. Just Transition

Participants voiced strong concern for informal workers. They stressed that no change should occur without protecting the livelihoods of those dependent on waste collection and plastic recycling. Ideas included creating job opportunities in eco-auditing and plastic-free product supply chains.

“We see the treaty as the world’s collective attempt to tackle plastic pollution. But without inclusiveness and affordability, how can we truly achieve it?” - Youth Participant, Kolkata

Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs)

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

RWAs were outspoken about the unchecked sale of thin plastic bags and packaging materials by

local vendors. They emphasised banning these products at the wholesale level rather than fining consumers.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

There was concern about air pollution from open plastic burning near residential zones, especially during community cleanups. They called for proper waste processing infrastructure that is not toxic to humans and the environment.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They felt disconnected from municipal systems but expressed readiness to maintain logs of household waste if the process was simplified. RWAs proposed being included in an official reporting network managed by ward offices.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

RWAs supported global mandates to pressure companies and vendors. Some cited examples where international packaging rules led to local improvements.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Participants shared stories of failed waste collection units due to poor maintenance and lack of funds. They demanded consistent funding with accountability for operation and training.

6. Just Transition

They were open to working with informal waste workers under regulated systems. Some RWAs proposed formal contracts or collaborations with cooperatives to reduce community waste while ensuring fair treatment.

"The treaty sounds promising, but people still prefer plastic for convenience. Without awareness and enforcement, rules alone won't help." - RWA Member, Kolkata

MSMEs

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

MSMEs criticised unregulated access to virgin plastic and called for caps on its supply. They felt that phasing out single-use plastics without transitional support created an unfair business environment.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Some businesses, especially in packaging, asked for clearer regulations and accessible testing centres. There was concern that imported raw materials might violate future safety norms.

3. Measuring What We Manage

Larger MSMEs expressed willingness to track their plastic use but wanted the system to be voluntary at first. They asked for digital templates and government-endorsed reporting tools.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They supported a global approach to compliance, arguing it would remove discrepancies across regions. Some saw an opportunity to export more if they adhered to cleaner production norms.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Finance was a top concern. MSMEs requested grants for machinery upgrades, tax relief for sustainable inputs, and reduced licensing burdens for businesses shifting to plastic-free goods.

6. Just Transition

Participants emphasised that daily wage workers and semi-skilled staff would face the brunt of the shift. They called for social security measures and government-run retraining centres.

"We've heard of the treaty, but at the end of the day, customers walk away when the price of eco-friendly alternatives goes up. That's our reality." - MSME Representative, Kolkata

Informal Waste Workers

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Informal workers feared a drop in recyclables if production decreases. However, they also acknowledged the growing difficulty in managing low-value, multilayer plastics.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Many complained of nausea and skin problems from dealing with soiled or chemical-laden plastics. Some workers recognised the dangers but had no protective equipment or health services.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They showed interest in group-based reporting, especially if it helped them gain recognition or access to support. There was a suggestion to use cooperative societies to log collective efforts.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They didn't know about the treaty but supported global pressure on brands to reduce harmful plastic. They felt policies must be enforced locally to be meaningful.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

They expressed dependence on middlemen and demanded mechanisms to sell directly to municipalities. Requests included tools, uniforms, and welfare linkages.

6. Just Transition

The workers demanded formal recognition, healthcare, and housing. They wanted roles in new systems such as material recovery facilities (MRFs) and plastic-free delivery services.

"I hadn't heard of the treaty before, but anything that makes our work safer is welcome. Right now, we sort through waste with bare hands, not knowing what's in it." - Informal Waste Worker, Kolkata

Conservancy Workers

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Conservancy workers supported plastic reduction as a way to ease the physical burden of their work. They described high volumes of plastic clogging drains and streets after rainfall.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Workers spoke of burns, rashes, and respiratory problems linked to sorting mixed or dangerous waste. They emphasised the need for better segregation and workplace hygiene.

3. Measuring What We Manage

There was no existing system to record their daily effort. Workers requested simple tools that could translate their labour into performance metrics or rewards.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They welcomed any global law that translated into cleaner streets and improved sanitation systems. Workers emphasised that policies should not remain "only on paper."

5. Real Action Means Real Money

They asked for continuous supply of safety gear, prompt salary payments, and workplace improvements. Medical checkups and restrooms were top priorities.

6. Just Transition

Participants sought permanent jobs and pensions. They felt disrespected and overworked, and called for clear pathways to career growth within city sanitation departments.

"We deal with torn garbage bags, blocked drains, and mixed waste every day. If the treaty can help people shift to safer alternatives, it will change our lives too." - Conservancy Worker, Kolkata

MUMBAI



Youth

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Youth in Mumbai emphasised the need to regulate plastic production upstream, especially in packaging. They highlighted over-reliance on plastic by the food delivery and e-commerce sectors and advocated stricter rules on those industries.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

While not deeply familiar with technical aspects, participants flagged the harmful nature of cheap plastic containers and microplastics in food packaging. They wanted regulation on plastic types that come into direct contact with consumables.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They supported digital tracking of plastic consumption and disposal. Ideas included university-level waste audits, QR-tagged items, and publishing real-time city data dashboards.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

There was a strong belief that local bans fail because global producers escape accountability. Youth wanted rules that applied to multinational corporations and were legally enforceable across countries.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Participants discussed the role of funding in enabling meaningful action. They proposed government support for green startups and youth-led innovation projects in recycling and packaging alternatives.

6. Just Transition

Youth recognised the vulnerability of informal workers. They recommended integrating youth volunteers with conservancy staff to improve mutual understanding and bridge the social gap.

"We imagine cleaner cities, sustainable products, and people using reusables like second nature. If we raise our voices now, we can help shape a world beyond plastic." - Youth Participant, Mumbai

Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs)

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Mumbai RWAs noted that banned items often reappeared due to weak enforcement. They advocated targeting distributors and manufacturers, rather than focusing solely on consumers.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

There was limited knowledge about chemical content in plastics. However, RWAs shared concerns about toxic fumes from waste burning near housing societies.

3. Measuring What We Manage

Several RWAs expressed willingness to monitor and report plastic waste generation, but lacked tools. They proposed community dashboards and ward-level monitoring systems.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

They hoped that a global treaty would compel uniform action across states and cities. RWAs stressed that multinational FMCG brands must be bound to redesign their packaging and promote reuse.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

There was frustration over the lack of financial aid to implement segregation and recycling programs. RWAs requested micro-grants to install decentralised systems in their societies.

6. Just Transition

Participants emphasised the need to integrate informal collectors into formal systems. They were willing to collaborate but asked for a framework from municipal bodies to ensure safety and clarity.

"The middle class is adapting, but real change needs structure - models we can replicate. Awareness is key, and support for startups and RWAs is long overdue." - RWA Member, Mumbai

MSMEs

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

MSMEs in Mumbai supported reduction in principle but stressed the need for clear timelines and guidance. Abrupt bans had previously caused business disruptions.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Some MSMEs raised concerns over their limited awareness of regulations on additives and chemical content. They requested clarity and accessible testing facilities.

3. Measuring What We Manage

Larger MSMEs showed openness to reporting their plastic use, especially if tied to incentives. Smaller units were cautious, fearing bureaucratic burden.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

Participants believed harmonised international rules would streamline compliance and help them compete in export markets with standardised environmental norms.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Accessing green finance was highlighted as a key barrier. MSMEs demanded single-window schemes for transitioning to eco-friendly production, along with tax rebates.

6. Just Transition

MSMEs flagged concerns over informal contract labourers who may lose jobs in transitions. They advocated government programs for upskilling, social security, and job matching.

"We're ready to explore sustainable options, but access to funding and technology is limited. Don't just regulate us. Help us be part of the solution." - MSME Representative, Mumbai

Informal Waste Workers

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Waste workers expressed anxiety that their income could drop if plastic availability decreased. They urged for alternative livelihoods or materials that could be collected and sold.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Health risks were a central issue. Workers described injuries from sharp, soiled, and chemical-laced plastic. They requested gloves, face masks, and safe sorting stations.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They were interested in documenting their daily collections and proposed a cooperative system to report plastic recovery, provided it resulted in recognition or support.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

While unfamiliar with the treaty, they supported any law that holds companies accountable for creating hard-to-recycle plastic and reduces dangerous materials.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

Workers requested direct financial support, equipment, health benefits, and waste-based remuneration. Many highlighted their dependency on scrap dealers.

6. Just Transition

Inclusion, recognition, and rights were the most common themes. They asked for ID cards, medical insurance, formal contracts, and educational support for their children.

"We're ready to learn. We just need someone to teach us and help us find new work. Don't leave us behind. If plastic goes, our families depend on this." - Informal Waste Worker, Mumbai

Conservancy Workers

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

Workers reported heavy workloads due to unregulated plastic waste. Some feared a drop in employment if plastic was drastically reduced without alternate roles planned for them.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals

Many reported exposure to harmful fumes and hazardous materials, particularly when handling mixed waste. They demanded proper safety gear and medical checkups.

3. Measuring What We Manage

They felt unacknowledged despite their role in plastic removal. Workers suggested punch cards or mobile apps that could record and credit their daily efforts.

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Lifecycle

Most workers were unfamiliar with global frameworks, but they hoped for rules that would "reach the ground" and clean up the systems they work in.

5. Real Action Means Real Money

They requested investments in sanitation infrastructure, washing stations, safe storage, and transportation. Financial security was a priority.

6. Just Transition

The dominant concern was job security. Workers wanted permanent positions, access to healthcare, pensions, and clear paths to advancement within municipal systems.

"We're not just collecting trash. We're keeping the system running. If there's a treaty about plastic, we should be in the room when the rules are made." - Conservancy Worker, Mumbai

Comparative Summary of City Findings

1. Reducing Plastic Production at Source

- **Common Insight:** Across all cities, there was unanimous agreement that reducing plastic production, especially single-use and packaging, must be addressed at the **manufacturer and distributor level**, not just through consumer-facing bans.
- **Delhi:** Youth and RWAs emphasised regulating FMCG companies and e-commerce packaging. MSMEs supported gradual phase-outs with clear roadmaps.
- **Mumbai:** All stakeholders criticised inconsistent bans. Youth and MSMEs saw policy stability as crucial for innovation and transition.
- **Kolkata:** Informal and conservancy workers warned that bans must be accompanied by alternative livelihood pathways. RWAs and MSMEs pushed for upstream controls at wholesale and distributor levels.
- **Chennai:** Youth and MSMEs recommended audits and product-specific transition timelines. RWAs advocated for regulation of plastic-intensive sectors like retail and delivery.

Key Trend:** Stakeholders want producer responsibility to be embedded in the treaty, with **phased bans, reduction in production, and policy predictability.

2. Eliminating Hazardous Chemicals in Plastics

- **Common Insight:** While technical awareness of chemical hazards was limited among most stakeholders, **firsthand health impacts** were widely reported by **informal and conservancy workers**, especially through sorting unsegregated waste.
- **Delhi & Mumbai:** Workers and RWAs cited skin and respiratory issues. Youth raised concerns about microplastics and leaching in food containers.
- **Kolkata:** Thermocol and contaminated waste were flagged; youth and MSMEs asked for clearer labelling and bans on specific dangerous materials.
- **Chennai:** Conservancy and informal workers highlighted injuries and infections from biomedical waste mixed with plastic. MSMEs wanted chemical regulations aligned with food safety norms.

***Key Trend:** There is strong support for **precautionary bans on toxic plastic types** and calls for **better awareness and protective gear** among workers.*

3. Measuring What We Manage (Transparency & Accountability)

- **Common Insight:** Stakeholders across all cities were **open to tracking and reporting plastic use and collection**, but only if **systems are simple, accessible, and linked to support or recognition**.
- **RWAs & Youth (All Cities):** Advocated for local dashboards, school-based audits, and public awareness through visible metrics.
- **MSMEs:** Supported phased reporting, starting voluntary, with government templates. Many feared bureaucratic overhead.
- **Informal Workers:** Supported cooperative-level documentation. Wanted recognition and incentives tied to accurate reporting.
- **Conservancy Workers:** Requested digital attendance tools, supervisor logs, and metrics linked to performance-based pay.

*Key Trend: There's enthusiasm for **digitised, low-barrier reporting systems** that validate community and worker efforts, especially if tied to incentives or visibility.*

4. Globally Binding Rules Across the Plastic Lifecycle

- **Common Insight:** Stakeholders across cities saw global rules as essential to **ensure corporate accountability, harmonise fragmented regulations, and boost the credibility of local policies**.
- **Youth:** Strongest advocates for global action, called out multinational brands escaping accountability via national loopholes.
- **RWAs & MSMEs:** Saw global norms as helpful in pushing suppliers and packaging producers toward consistency.
- **Informal & Conservancy Workers:** Unfamiliar with the treaty, but broadly supported rules that “change what companies do” and “reach the ground.”

*Key Trend: Stakeholders want the treaty to **enforce global standards on corporate behaviour and compel uniform packaging and production rules**.*

5. Financing and Real Implementation

- **Common Insight:** There is widespread demand for **stable, predictable funding** for infrastructure, equipment, community programs, and worker welfare. Most pilot initiatives fail due to **inconsistent or short-term financing**.
- **RWAs:** Sought support for composting, plastic-free zones, and microgrants.
- **MSMEs:** Requested green transition funds, tax relief, and access to innovation support.
- **Youth:** Proposed funding for climate clubs, awareness drives, and entrepreneurship.
- **Informal & Conservancy Workers:** Demanded direct financial support, protective gear, health benefits, job security, and infrastructure like toilets and resting areas.

***Key Trend:** A cross-sector call for **dedicated financial mechanisms tied to treaty targets**, with a focus on equitable and easy-to-access funding.*

6. Just Transition for Affected Communities

- **Common Insight:** This was **universally the strongest emotional and moral concern**, particularly around the livelihoods of informal waste workers and the dignity of conservancy staff. All groups, especially youth and RWAs, **advocated for their inclusion, protection, and recognition**.
- **Informal Workers:** Called for ID cards, stable income, training, and protection from harassment.
- **Conservancy Workers:** Demanded permanent contracts, pensions, better facilities, and social respect.
- **RWAs & Youth:** Supported formal collaborations and co-management models with informal actors, given proper structure and institutional backing.
- **MSMEs:** Highlighted vulnerabilities of informal contract labour and urged for skilling schemes and social security nets.

***Key Trend:** The treaty must **centre worker voices**, ensure **co-created transition plans**, and **protect community health and dignity**.*

A Unified Message from the Ground

Despite differences in geography, stakeholder type, or sector, the focus group discussions revealed **shared expectations** for the Global Plastics Treaty:

- Plastic pollution must be tackled **at its source**, not just at disposal.
- Workers and communities **must be recognised and protected** through clear rights, financing, and inclusion.
- The treaty must enable a **just, inclusive, enforceable, and well-funded transition**, not voluntary commitments or symbolic actions.

RECOMMENDATIONS



5. Recommendations

Toward an Equitable and Effective Global Plastics Treaty

Based on multi-stakeholder focus group discussions across four Indian cities: Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai, this section presents actionable recommendations. These insights reflect the aspirations, challenges, and needs of diverse groups including youth, RWAs, MSMEs, informal waste workers, and conservancy workers.

1. Enact Legally Binding Measures to Reduce Plastic Production at Source

- **Adopt upstream targets** that cap and phase down the production of virgin plastics, especially single-use and non-essential categories.
- **Integrate sector-specific roadmaps** to ensure that MSMEs and informal sector actors are consulted and supported during the transition.
- **Ban polymers and formats that have no circular potential**, such as multilayered packaging and thermocol, which are costly to recover and recycle.

2. Eliminate Hazardous Chemicals in Plastics Across the Lifecycle

- **Operationalise the precautionary principle** to ban chemical additives known to harm human health, especially in packaging and food-contact plastics.
- **Develop a global watchlist of restricted substances**, with clear labelling requirements to aid safe handling and reuse.
- **Invest in health monitoring systems** for waste workers and sanitation personnel exposed to high-risk plastic waste.

3. Mandate Transparent, Standardised Reporting and Traceability

- **Establish global disclosure requirements** for plastic producers and users, harmonised across borders to ensure comparability and compliance.
- **Create publicly accessible data platforms** that allow communities and municipalities to monitor plastic flows, including informal recovery contributions.
- **Develop digital tools and templates** for waste collectors and local actors to easily track and report plastic collection and recycling volumes.

4. Adopt Globally Binding Rules Covering the Entire Plastic Lifecycle

- **Ensure treaty obligations apply to the full value chain**, from extraction to production and design to disposal and remediation.

- **Move beyond voluntary pledges** to enforceable provisions, with compliance mechanisms and sanctions for non-implementation.
- **Promote alignment across national and sub-national levels**, supporting integrated action by municipalities, civil society, and industry.

5. Commit to Robust Means of Implementation and Finance

- **Establish a dedicated, multilateral funding mechanism** to support treaty implementation in low- and middle-income countries.
- **Prioritise direct access to finance** for local governments, cooperatives, and MSMEs working on plastic alternatives and waste management.
- **Implement an extended producer responsibility (EPR) framework** that includes mandatory contributions from plastic producers to fund collection, treatment that is non-toxic, and innovation.

6. Ensure a Just Transition for Affected Communities and Workers

- **Guarantee legal recognition and protection** for informal and conservancy workers across the plastic waste value chain.
- **Create inclusive policymaking processes** that formally integrate the voices of grassroots recyclers, sanitation workers, and vulnerable communities.
- **Support reskilling, livelihood diversification, and social protection programs**, ensuring no worker or community is left behind as plastic use is scaled down.

CONCLUSION



6. Conclusion

The focus group discussions conducted across Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata and Mumbai offer a compelling grassroots perspective on the opportunities and challenges presented by the Global Plastics Treaty. From youth leaders to conservancy workers, participants underscored a shared truth: plastic pollution is a deeply embedded issue with real, immediate consequences for health, livelihoods, and local ecosystems.

Despite varying levels of awareness, there was near-universal support for decisive global action, provided it is inclusive, just, and backed by robust implementation mechanisms. Across all stakeholder groups, participants did not merely voice concerns; they offered concrete ideas, demonstrated readiness to act, and highlighted structural barriers that must be addressed for change to be effective.

Crucially, the findings reveal that the success of the treaty will not rest on ambition alone, but on the credibility of its delivery, **how clearly it sets rules, how equitably it distributes responsibilities, and how meaningfully it supports those most affected.**

The voices captured in this exercise emphasise three overarching imperatives for treaty negotiators and policymakers:

1. **Commit to a clear and ambitious reduction in plastic production:** Tackle the crisis at its root by addressing upstream drivers.
2. **Eliminate hazardous chemicals in plastics:** Protect human health and the environment by phasing out toxic additives and substances.
3. **Embed justice and equity at the heart of the treaty:** recognise and uplift informal and frontline workers.

This moment is historic. The world has a rare opportunity to not only end plastic pollution but to transform the systems that created it, towards a future that is circular, healthy, and just for all. These community insights must not remain on the margins. They must help shape the treaty's foundations, ensuring it is a tool of empowerment, accountability, and transformation.

Final Note to Policymakers

The Global Plastics Treaty must be more than an environmental accord, it must be a framework for **economic justice, public health, and intergenerational equity**. A just, transparent, and enforceable treaty that centres both people and planet will not only reduce pollution but rebuild trust, resilience, and cooperation across borders and societies.



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