Plastic Pollution Literacy Kit

Stakeholder Roles

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UN India (2025) Plastic Pollution Literacy Kit: Stakeholder Roles

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Foreword

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Plastics, plastics everywhere... Not a place left. From the highest peaks to the deepest ocean floors, from the mother's womb to the foods we eat, plastics are omnipresent.

Indiscriminate use and disposal of plastics, especially single-use plastics, are a grave environmental, economic, and social problem threatening our planet. Humankind has produced 9.2 billion tons of plastic, of which 7 billion, the vast majority, have become waste. Only 9% of plastic is recycled. Using a life-cycle approach to plastics can both dramatically reduce this harmful waste and save the world $4.5 trillion through 2040.

The world celebrates World Environment Day each year on 5 June. This year, we do so under the urgent theme "Ending plastic pollution". This compilation, conceptualised and led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in India along with the UN India Country Team, aims to provide a quick reckoner to help all of us initiate practical actions to end plastic pollution.

The Government of India is taking important steps towards more progressive policies to end plastic pollution, such as the ban on the use of single-use plastics, and bringing increasing focus on life cycle approaches. Stakeholder groups across industry and civil society are also playing a key role, from feeding into the policy-making process as well as translating that policy into impact on the ground.

Though the list of groups identified in this compilation is not exhaustive, it does reflect the potential roles of a broad range of different stakeholders, from citizens to policymakers, and from youth to social influencers.

The UN India team hopes that these suggested actions will help bring about both behavioural and systemic changes in the way we deal with plastic pollution at all levels, from the individual, household, and community to national and even global impact.

Each action can be further elaborated for support and investment. The UN in India is ready to be your partner in achieving this important aspiration. Let's end plastic pollution together!

About the 'Plastic Pollution Literacy Kit'

The Kit is designed to be a community empowerment resource, providing simple, relatable information to diverse stakeholders in support of eliminating plastic waste and pollution, including banning single-use plastics.

Led by UNEP's India office, in collaboration with the broader UN Country Team in India, the Kit provides information aimed at reaching out to the public, ensuring changes to lifestyle choices and consumption patterns in plastic usage.

The Kit will be translated into multiple languages to further extend its reach and impact.

Launched in support of World Environment Day 2025, this Kit will be updated periodically.

Introduction[1]

Plastics are an important element of the modern world, used in everything from car parts to medical devices. Since the 1950s, researchers estimate humanity has produced 9.2 billion tons of material, some 7 billion tons of which have become waste.

A major source of plastic pollution is single-use plastic products, which overwhelm waste systems as they enter the environment. Single-use plastic products include water bottles, dispensing containers, takeaway bags, disposable cutlery, freezer bags, and packaging foam.

Only about 9% of plastics are recycled, according to a study from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Global plastic production doubled between 2000 and 2019. Recycling is a major problem.

Governments, corporations, non-profit organizations, and people worldwide are already rolling out innovative solutions to end plastic pollution. And research suggests the lifecycle approach could save the world $4.5 trillion in social and environmental costs through 2040.

In practical terms, we need to reduce our dependence on single-use plastic products. It means redesigning plastic products so that they last longer, are less dangerous, and can be reused and ultimately recycled.

So, what can each of the stakeholder groups do to end plastic pollution? Read on...

[1] This section is based on UNEP's publication Answering 10 pressing questions about plastic pollution. https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/answering-10-pressing-questions-about-plastic-pollution

Industry

Take responsibility for the plastic waste produced. This includes significantly reducing waste, using eco-friendly materials and reducing plastic packaging, and using the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) guidelines.

Collaborate and support governments and communities to find and implement sustainable alternatives to plastics.

Create entrepreneurship opportunities and help with aggregating technologies that focus on using alternatives, as well as discarded plastic.

Academia & Research

Prioritise research on finding alternatives to plastics and improving waste management systems.

Help raise awareness through educational programmes and research on the environmental impact of plastics, health, and related impacts on society.

Promote research and development on changing consumer choices and behavior.

Ensure institutions are plastic-free and use youth as a force for advocacy against plastic pollution.

Governments

Draft appropriate policies for controlling plastics pollution based on scientific evidence and consultation, and ensure strengthened compliance at all levels.

Develop targets, road map, and action plans for implementing and monitoring national- and state-level policies in support of reducing and ending plastic waste generation.

Obtain measures for enforcing policies on the ground with community participation at the local levels.

Provide opportunities for the segregation, recycling, and disposal of plastic waste through investments and enterprise development.

Communities

Play a crucial role in increasing awareness of stopping the use of single-use plastics.

Lead initiatives such as segregation at source and composting.

Promote the use of suitable alternatives to plastic products and the adoption of reuse and refill models to reduce waste generation.

Prioritise household-level actions to end plastic pollution.

Media

Spread awareness about ways to end plastic pollution and encourage sustainable alternatives.

Feature stories and communicate the urgent need to reduce plastic waste and the benefits of using eco-friendly alternatives.

Promote campaigns against single-use plastics.

Youth

Inculcate habits to do away with using plastics, prevent littering, support segregation, and spread public awareness about the issue.

Develop innovative ideas for avoiding plastic products, adopting a reuse/refill model, and rejuvenating natural systems by reducing plastic pollution.

Support advocacy campaigns against plastic pollution.

Develop sustainable enterprises for reusing and recycling plastic waste.

Citizens

Support government policies on reducing plastic pollution and assist in the effective segregation and management of plastic waste.

Help stop the use of single-use plastics.

Inculcate habits to do away with unnecessary and avoidable plastics, prevent littering, support segregation, and spread public awareness about the issue.

Support community-level ideas on avoiding plastic products, adopting a reuse/refill model, and rejuvenating natural systems by reducing plastic pollution.

Politicians

Make ending plastic pollution part of political manifestos.

Build public campaigns for the development of policies to deal with plastic pollution and manage plastic waste.

Support the development of local infrastructure for better collection and segregation of plastics.

Spread public awareness about plastic pollution and messaging to do away with unnecessary and avoidable plastics, prevent littering, and support segregation.

Help communities implement local ideas about avoiding plastic products, adopting a reuse/refill model, and rejuvenating natural systems by reducing plastic pollution.

Influencers

Build online and offline campaigns for reducing plastic pollution and managing plastic waste.

Spread public awareness about plastic pollution and messaging to do away with unnecessary and avoidable plastics, prevent littering, and support segregation.

Support communities with information about strategies for avoiding plastic products, adopting a reuse/refill model, and rejuvenating natural systems by reducing plastic pollution.

Increase awareness about the health, environmental, and economic impacts of plastic pollution.

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

Adopt a circular economic approach and practices for plastic pollution, such as product design, reuse, refill, and use of plastic packaging amenable to recycling.

Lead development of innovative recycling technologies for processing plastic waste.

Shift towards producing and utilising biodegradable and compostable materials, replacing banned single-use plastic items.

Adopt and promote Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) standards and support sustainable production and consumption.

Glossary of Terms

Circular Economy
A regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emissions, and energy leakages are minimised through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, sharing, re-manufacturing, refurbishing, and recycling activities[2].

Eco-Friendly/ Biodegradable Alternatives
Materials that can be naturally decomposed by microorganisms in the environment and converted into carbon dioxide, water, and nutrients.

Enterprise Development
The process of increasing the capacity of individuals, families, groups, and organisations to supply useful goods and services profitably to the market.

Extended Producer Responsibility
An environmental policy approach that holds producers accountable for the entire lifecycle of their products, including the post-consumer stage[3]. It is based on the 'polluter pays principle'.

Life-Cycle Approach
An approach to plastic that ensures the identification of key hotspots in the production and consumption system by considering all potential impacts (on climate, ecosystems, toxicity, jobs, economy, etc.) caused by plastic products/goods/services (and their alternatives), in each stage of their life cycle, from the extraction of raw materials and processing of secondary materials to product manufacture, distribution, maintenance and use, and end-of-life management[4].

Water Segregation
The process of identifying, classifying, dividing, and sorting waste products to reduce, reuse, and recycle materials[5]. It is usually done at the source.

Single-Use Plastics
Single-use plastic products are used once, or for a short period, before being thrown away[6].

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[2] https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/circular_economy_14_march.pdf

[3] https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/extended-producer-responsibility_67587b0b-en.html#:~:text=Extended%20Producer%20Responsibility%20(EPR)%20is,and%20electronic%20waste%20and%20textiles.

[4] https://www.lifecycleinitiative.org/activities/life-cycle-assessment-in-high-impact-sectors/life-cycle-approach-to-plastic-pollution

[5] https://greensutra.in/waste-segregation-all-you-need-to-know/

[6] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/plastics/single-use-plastics_en

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