

Climate Action

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A group of innovative volunteerism actors assemble used plastics to prepare them for a process of recycling to be used to make textile items for the fashion industry. (Image courtesy from an Innovative Volunteerism actors image gallery)

FIXING THE PLASTIC POLLUTION PROBLEM AND THE RESULTS OF THE CONCLUDED UNEA 5.2: IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA

In context, the globe is under the weight of diverse environmental challenges that threaten human and economic development towards realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and recovery from the COVID-19 emergency. An estimated 11 million tonnes of plastic waste flow into the ocean every year as I pen this article. By 2025, 100 million to 250 million metric tons of plastic waste could enter the sea each year. Between 2021 and 2040, the cumulative cost of managing plastic waste is estimated to be US\$670 billion. If we fail to take action, this inaction will pose a financial risk to economies and businesses across the globe, estimated at \$100billion every year by 2040. These costs manifest as damage to livelihoods and economic industries. The newsletter covers results of UNEA 5.2 on plastic ban and how to fix the menace.

FIXING THE PLASTIC POLLUTION PROBLEM AND THE RESULTS OF THE JUST CONCLUDED UNEA 5.2 : IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICA



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The UNEA 5.2 has emphasised on the need to implement recycling of wastes to minimize environmental pollution. The need for manufacturers to make reusable products to control the use of plastic and its microplastics items to stop plastic pollution.

In context, the globe is under the weight of diverse environmental challenges that threaten human and economic development towards realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and recovery from the COVID-19 emergency. An estimated 11 million tonnes of plastic waste flow into the ocean every year as I pen this article. By 2025, 100 million to 250 million metric tons of plastic waste could enter the sea each year. Between 2021 and 2040, the cumulative cost of managing plastic waste is estimated to be US\$670 billion. If we fail to take action, this inaction will pose a financial risk to economies and businesses across the globe, estimated at \$100billion every year by 2040.

These costs manifest as damage to livelihoods and key economic industries such as fishing and tourism, clean-up costs and threats to the health of the populations. On March 2, 2022, representatives from 175 nations worldwide took a historic step toward ending pollution. The United Nations Environment Assembly voted to task a committee for forging a legally binding global treaty on plastic pollution by 2024..

Why is the Treaty important?

Just consider this – the chemicals in plastic have been

associated with severe health problems like hormone-related cancers, infertility, neurodevelopment disorders, among others. The plastic production process exposes communities to over 170 toxic chemicals – with children being most vulnerable. Combining the production and waste incineration of plastics is projected to emit the equivalent of 615 coal plants by 2050 to escalate climate change further.

All these risks notwithstanding, the global plastic market continues to grow. It was valued at \$579.7billion in 2020 and projected to grow at a compound annual rate of 3.4% up to 2028.

What the globe then needs to do is to prevent the release of all these plastics into the environment where they cause harm to human & environmental health and maintain them more in the production cycle – what we call a circular economy. Currently, less than 10% of all plastic waste globally is recycled. In Africa, the figure is much lower at about 4%. Recycling these plastics portends between \$80 – 120billion in income, enterprise, and economic growth opportunities globally through the packaging industry alone.

There is need to incorporate measures that reduce the sting of plastics - such as recycling & reuse - which will go a long way in reducing their carbon tax liabilities

The treaty in question comes to put in place a regulatory framework to actualise this much-needed circularity. It establishes an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) with a mandate to negotiate a legally binding global agreement to address plastic pollution towards reducing the discharge of plastics into the environment by covering all stages of the plastic life cycle and adopting a circular economy approach to plastics. It provides a legal & policy framework within which investments in recycling and other techniques towards beating plastic pollution can be prioritised across the globe

A key attribute is that the resolution is “international” or “transboundary”. This is very important to note because plastic waste is transboundary. Plastic litter knows no boundaries. When realised in the coastlines of one country, it ends up causing effects on the shores of neighbouring countries and globally.

What does it mean for the plastic manufacturers and producers moving forward?

It means one thing – “alternative opportunities”. Recycling alone portends up to \$120 billion in enterprise opportunities globally. Reusing & recycling also generates energy savings – estimated up to 87%. Those making plastics should now diversify towards recycling to tap these opportunities. In addition, as more countries put forward commitments to minimise emissions in line with the net-zero targets of 2050, carbon taxes are beginning to take effect, and plastics will be one of the areas most targeted, considering that they are projected to contribute up to 20% of emissions.

Incorporating measures that reduce the sting of plastics – such as recycling & reuse – will go a long way in reducing their carbon tax liabilities. This is vital for manufacturers of plastic items to be able to align themselves with the set standards and regulations.



Heaps of used plastic bottles in a recycling yard, Recycling business is an opportunity that portends upto \$120 billion in enterprise opportunities.

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An image courtesy of Arican Development Bank (AFDB) showing a factory worker placing collected plastics in a recycling machine.



An Innovative Volunteerism actor Adejoke Lasisi using knowledge acquired from training to turn waste to wealth and driving sustainable production and consumption in the fashion industry . They source plastic bags and weave them into fabricated materials.

What will it change?

This resolution portents opportunities for enterprises that provide alternatives to plastics and those that enhance circularity in plastics – especially for the youth who are already showing their innovativeness.

We already see examples of such enterprises at play in Africa. For instance, Leveraging on #InnovativeVolunteerism #skillsretooling @AdejokeLasisi is turning #WasteToWealth driving #sustainablefashion. They source plastic bags and weave them into fabricated materials.

Leveraging on the spirit of #InnovativeVolunteerism, young people collect waste from the streets and build the capacity of other #youth by training them to turn plastic waste into bricks, tiles etc. #WasteToWealth #ClimateAction. They are recycling plastic waste into paving tiles. These have proven to be up to 30% cheaper than conventional concrete blocks and five to seven times stronger than concrete while being much more affordable to transport.

What needs to be addressed by African Countries?

Africa suffers from plastics released elsewhere, while others suffer from the plastic released in Africa. The entire continent generates just about a 16.25million tonnes of plastic waste, against a global total of over a 242million tonnes. This then means Africa is among regions that urgently needs investments

in the circularity in plastic waste enhanced. Currently, only 4% of all waste in Africa is recycled against a target of 50% by 2023 set by the AU Agenda 2063. In one country alone, plastic recycling has created over 4000 direct jobs and over 30,000 indirect jobs, and this has added over \$16million directly into people's pockets through the payroll. Therefore, the point is that Africa urgently needs to embrace circularity in plastic waste to reduce the amounts that end up in oceans and reap benefits..

Incentives such as tax breaks, incentivising financiers to prioritise investments in plastic recycling, reskilling & training, and business incubation will go a long way to catalyse the growth of local enterprises engaged in recycling, which is a formidable strategy for circularity in plastics.

Ending plastic pollution: Towards an Internationally binding instrument?

The just concluded United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA 5.2) covered a very vital issue of environmental protection by legally binding international instrument noting with concern the high and rapidly increasing levels of plastic pollution which represents a serious environmental problem at a global scale, negatively impacting the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development, plastic pollution on marine and other environment, there was need to tackle the menace through the following resolutions adopted.

Preceding this discussion and reaffirming the general assembly resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015 which adopted the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and the principles of the Rio declaration on Environment and Development of Rio, 1992 which stressed the need to strengthen the science-policy interface at all levels and improve the understanding of the global impact of plastic pollution on the environment while recognizing the importance role played by plastics in society. This also recalls the United Nations Environment Assembly resolutions 1/6,2/11,3/7,4/6,4/7 and 4/9 affirming the urgent need to strengthen global cooperation, coordination and governance to take immediate action towards the long term elimination of plastic pollution to the ecosystem. The following resolutions were adopted;

Recognizing a wide range of approaches, sustainable alternatives and technologies available to address the full life cycle of plastics further highlighting the need for international cooperation to facilitate access to technology, capacity building and scientific and technical cooperation.

Underlining the importance of promoting sustainable design of products and materials so that they can be reused, remanufactured or recycled and therefore retained in the economy for as long as possible, along with the resources they are made of, and of minimizing the generation of waste which can significantly contribute to sustainable production and consumption of plastics.

Welcoming efforts made by Governments and international organizations, in particular through national, regional and international action plans, initiatives and instruments, including relevant multilateral agreements and recognizing the need for complementary actions and a coherent and coordinated long-term global vision.

Noting with appreciation the significant work of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and action to tackle marine litter and plastic pollution supported and implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme, and taking into account the Chair's summary of the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics, which presented options for continued work for consideration by the United Nations Environment Assembly at its fifth session.

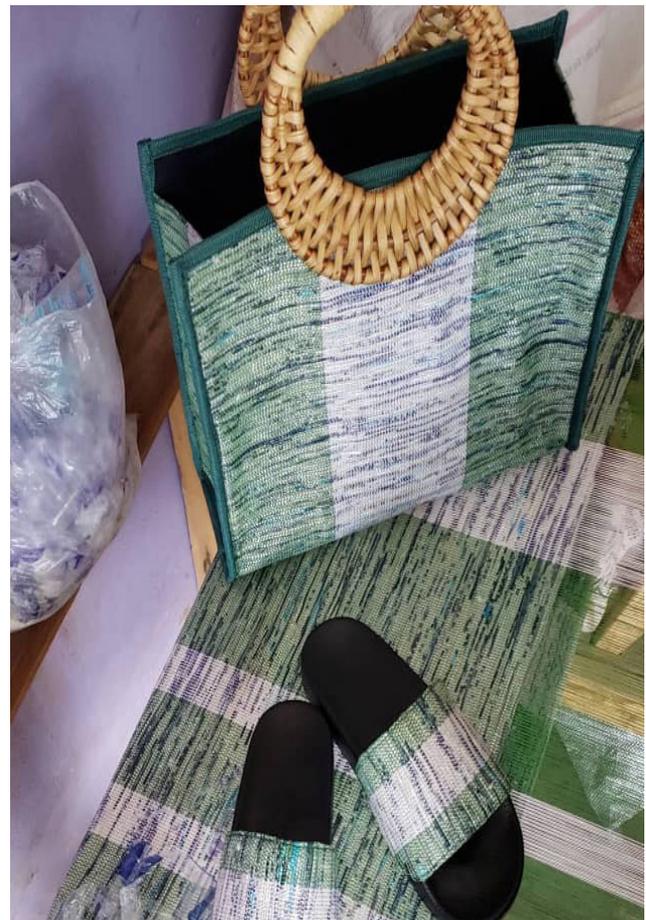
Reaffirming the importance of cooperation, coordination and complementarity among relevant regional and international conventions and instruments, with due respect for their respective mandates to prevent plastic pollution and its related risks to human health and adverse effects on human well-being and the environment including the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships of 1973, as modified by the Protocol of 1978 relating thereto and as further amended by the Protocol of 1997; the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their

Disposal; the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade; the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants; the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea; the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter of 1972 and the Protocol thereto; the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management; the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; the Convention on Biological Diversity; and other international organizations, regional instruments and programmes, and recognizing efforts led by non-governmental organizations and the private sector,

Recognizing that each country is best positioned to understand its own national circumstances, including its stakeholder activities, related to addressing plastic pollution, including in the marine environment,

Recognizing also the significant contribution made by workers in informal and cooperative settings to the collecting, sorting and recycling of plastics in many countries,

Underlining that further international action is needed by developing an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment,



An exhibition of a bag and shoes made from recycled plastic materials by an Innovative Volunteerism actor



Strengthening the institutional capacities for the delivery of climate action enterprises. Increase better health and welfare of our environment using ecosystem based adaptation approaches and awareness campaigns using various available channels. UNEP-EBAFOSA has enhanced capacity building of insitutions necessary to spearhead sustainable production and climate action enterprises in Africa.

[Register to become an Innovative volunteerism actor at : Registration link \(Click\)](#)

[Join our continental platform of agro-industry actors and fill your GAP at : Registration link to join MeBAFOSA \(Click\)](#)

