

# How to leverage policy, industry risk and global innovation to address plastic pollution

“How to” workshop summary

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# Summary

The global plastic pollution crisis demands urgent and co-ordinated action from policymakers, businesses and innovators. This workshop explored how risk, policy and innovation can drive systemic change, particularly in the context of the UN's Global Plastics Treaty. Discussions highlighted the necessity for stronger legislation, industry collaboration and the rapid adoption of sustainable materials. The following key takeaways summarise the solutions discussed:

## Key messages and takeaways

### A weak treaty is worse than no treaty

A diluted, non-binding agreement risks cementing inaction under the illusion of progress. A treaty that lacks clarity, ambition or enforcement mechanisms could delay real change by years. A robust, science-based and enforceable treaty is essential to deliver measurable outcomes.

### Human health as the defining motivator

The most compelling driver for tackling plastic pollution is the threat it poses to human health. Microplastics and toxic chemicals are now found in blood, placentas and breast milk. Framing plastic pollution as a health emergency—rather than solely an environmental concern—can sharpen policy focus and catalyse faster responses across sectors.

### Liability and the true cost of plastic

With growing awareness of plastic's health and ecological impacts, legal and financial exposure for producers is increasing. Extended producer responsibility must reflect the full cost of plastic waste, including environmental damage and health-related consequences. Market mechanisms should be updated to account for this shifting risk landscape.



## **Banning harmful and unnecessary plastics**

India's successful ban on 22 single-use plastic products demonstrates that daily life can continue without them. Immediate bans on clearly harmful or unnecessary plastic items can be implemented without disruption and should be expanded globally.

## **Embedding sustainability in education**

Future material scientists and chemical engineers must be trained to develop products that degrade safely in soil, sea and sunlight. Curriculums and research investment should prioritise biodegradable material design to accelerate the shift away from fossil-derived plastics.

## **Regulation, not education, changes behaviour**

Evidence shows that major shifts in public and corporate behaviour are achieved through regulation, not voluntary campaigns. Smoking bans, asbestos controls and seatbelt laws all illustrate how effective legislation drives compliance at scale. Plastic policy must follow suit.

## **Incentivising sustainable materials**

Adoption of sustainable alternatives remains constrained by cost, production infrastructure and material performance concerns. Current subsidies and externalised costs make fossil-fuel plastics artificially competitive. Redirecting incentives towards innovation in materials, such as cellulose, seaweed, fermented proteins and agri-waste, will create the conditions for widespread adoption.

## **A fair transition for the global south**

The global south continues to bear a disproportionate share of the plastic burden, often serving as a destination for exported waste. A just transition must prevent the outsourcing of pollution and embed protections against further exploitation within the treaty framework.

## **Bridging gaps in treaty negotiations**

Many stakeholders remain unaware of ongoing intercessional work between official negotiation rounds. This lack of transparency limits broader participation. More structured communication and stakeholder engagement are required to maintain momentum and ensure treaty outcomes reflect global expertise.

## **Conclusion**

Plastic pollution is contaminating ecosystems and human bodies alike. Delays, weak commitments and performative gestures will exacerbate harm and entrench inequality. The Global Plastics Treaty must be ambitious, enforceable and informed by science. This session underscored the need for bold policy, industry accountability and material innovation to prevent irreversible damage.

