

REPORT SUMMARY



Presented By
SDPI

Background/Introduction

Plastics, renowned for their versatility and widespread use across various industries, have transformed our modern lifestyle. However, the escalating global plastic waste crisis has underscored the urgent need for change. According to the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), plastic consumption is projected to double by 2040 compared to 2016, generating approximately 400 million tonnes of plastic waste annually. Shockingly, only a small fraction - 12% - is incinerated, and a mere 9% is recycled. The repercussions of plastic waste are alarming, including pollution, resource depletion, and severe environmental damage. It can take hundreds of years for a simple plastic bag to degrade, while a plastic bottle can persist for approximately 300 years. In the face of this environmental crisis, a paradigm shift towards a sustainable circular economy becomes imperative.

In a world witnessing an exponential rise in the consumption of single-use plastic shopping bags and their adverse environmental impact, it is our shared responsibility to find effective solutions. Lightweight, reusable, durable, and inexpensive these bags may be, but their use results in significant environmental challenges such as clogging drains, endangering marine life, and posing health concerns to people.





In South Asia, Pakistan leads in mismanaged plastic waste, producing 3.3 million tonnes annually. Plastics constitute 65% of the waste stream, originating from various sectors. Pakistan's plastic waste amounts to the height of two K-2 mountains, reaching 16,500 meters if piled together. To address this crisis, UNEP's International Negotiating Committee convened its second session in June. Its goal: to craft a binding global agreement on plastic pollution, encompassing marine environments. Through stakeholder negotiations, this collaborative Endeavor aims to catalyse effective global action, fostering a sustainable future.

Moreover, a circular economy approach, focused on recycling, reuse, redesign, and waste reduction, offers a compelling solution to the plastic challenge. By reimagining our relationship with plastics and adopting a circular economy mindset, we can forge a path towards a more sustainable and resilient world, mitigating the adverse impacts of plastic waste and embracing a more sustainable future for generations to come. In response to these alarming concerns, 128 nations, including Pakistan, have imposed bans on the production and usage of plastic shopping bags, as per the United Nations. However, the enforcement of these bans, particularly in Pakistan, is far from straightforward due to limited financial and physical resources.

Recognizing the urgent need for a more comprehensive approach, researchers from the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) AND COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) have collaboratively organized sessions on achieving plastic circularity in Pakistan by engaging key stakeholders from government bodies, industries, development partners and regional organisations to explore solutions for efficient plastic waste management . The discussions were delved into the challenges faced in plastic waste management, such as inadequate infrastructure and low recycling rates, while examining the potential of innovative technologies and best practices from other countries



Discussion

At a policy dialogue titled “Towards Plastic Circularity in Pakistan: Solutions and Way Forward,” experts emphasized the necessity of behavioural changes at the individual level to reduce excessive plastic use. The dialogue highlighted the importance of engaging with small and medium enterprises, the private sector, and industries to promote alternatives to plastic and scale up circular practices.

The alarming levels of plastic pollution in Pakistan, producing approximately 3.3 million tons annually, were noted as a pressing concern. Experts also pointed out substantial economic losses due to plastic waste and highlighted untapped business opportunities in circular practices across various sectors. They urged the private sector to develop circular business models to protect the environment and human health. Representatives emphasized the ongoing demand for plastic products but stressed the need for robust infrastructure for plastic waste circularity to gradually reduce its presence and explore sustainable alternatives. Plans were outlined to collect plastic waste, focusing on PETs and bottles, while collaboration among stakeholders was called for to promote circularity. Recommendations included incentivizing circular industries through tax breaks and customs duty reductions.

The dialogue emphasized the importance of government involvement in promoting plastic circularity and allocating funds for research and development to discover sustainable solutions. In another session organized by COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus in collaboration with Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), discussions focused on improving the effectiveness of plastic bag bans in Pakistan. It was highlighted that enforcing the ban on plastic bags remained a significant challenge, with observed success rates declining sharply. The necessity of a comprehensive economic and regulatory framework, along with collaboration from the research community and stakeholders, was emphasized to support the efforts of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in enforcing the ban effectively.

Lack of coordination among provinces in managing plastic waste, absence of a nationwide policy on plastic bag bans, the importance of behavioural change among individuals, and the need for comprehensive data collection were identified as key issues. Gaps in policy implementation, insufficient individual efforts, and the importance of penalties, coordination among provinces, addressing the lack of recycling infrastructure, and raising awareness about reducing plastic waste were recognized as crucial steps in advancing effective plastic waste management efforts in Pakistan.



Proposed Policy Recommendations:

These policy recommendations propose a comprehensive approach for Pakistan to achieve plastic circularity, focusing on innovative economic models, corporate responsibility, inclusive strategies, and practical support for the recycling sector:

1. Transition towards a circular plastic economy by designing products for multiple uses, reparability, and recyclability, requiring collaborative efforts from the government, businesses, consumers, and organizations like UNEP.
2. Enhance recycling practices by improving recyclability and incorporating sustainable materials, necessitating collaborative efforts from various stakeholders.
3. Hold industries accountable for their plastic production through efficient collection and recycling systems, establishing necessary infrastructure, and setting recycling standards, especially for challenging plastics.
4. Introduce behavioral nudges to promote compliance and encourage the adoption of alternative materials, fostering sustainable consumption habits and reducing reliance on plastic.
5. Enforce Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) legislation to hold industries accountable for waste, incentivizing investment in recycling infrastructure and sustainable packaging materials.
6. Create a central authority to improve inter-provincial communication and ensure consistent enforcement of nationwide plastic reduction policies.
7. Implement comprehensive waste management policies, including grade packaging standards and promotion of eco-friendly alternatives, to address cultural attitudes towards plastic bans.
8. Support the recycling industry by assisting with raw material inputs, considering Pakistan's economic constraints, instead of offering tax breaks.



Session 1: “Towards Plastic Circularity in Pakistan: Solutions and Way Forward”

SPEAKERS

Mr Charles Schneider
Ms Mehak Masood
Ms Ayesha Aziz
Mr Kashif Ali Tipu
Ms Youngran Hur
Dr Amna Farrukh
Mr Umer Abdul Aziz
Mr Hafiz Jawad Sohail,
Muhammad Bin Shahzad
Ms Rija Tayyab
Ms Maha Kama
Mr Sahib Alam Khan

Organization

IFC
Artistic Milliners
Packages Limited
Fr. DC Larkana
UNEP
FAST NUCES, Lahore
WSSC
UN
Nestle, Pakistan
Tetra Pack Pakistan
Roshan Packages
TWB
WWF



Session 2: “Dialogue on Improving the Effectiveness of Plastic Bags Ban”

Speakers

Asad Hussain
Dr Muhammad Khan
Ms Romina Khursheed
Ms Farzana Altaf

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Parliamentarian
EPA

