

A circular economy for plastic

The India Plastics Pact will benefit society, the economy and the environment

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The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has long been at the forefront of addressing issues challenging the well-being of society. Of the many sustainability challenges that impact societies, climate change and plastic waste have a special significance. A 2019 report by the Center for International Environmental Law suggests that by 2050, greenhouse gas emissions from plastic could reach over 56 gigatonnes, 10-13% of the remaining carbon budget. However, viewed from the angle of livelihoods, post-consumer segregation, collection and disposal of plastics make up about half of the income of 1.5- 4 million waste-pickers in India.

A 2021 report commissioned by Google, Closing the Plastics Circularity Gap, suggests that unless large-scale global interventions are made, “we should expect to mismanage more than 7.7 billion metric tonnes of plastic waste globally over the next 20 years... [which is] equivalent to 16-times the weight of the human population...” Among the many applications of plastic, plastic packaging is the largest.

The solution

For India, the solution must be multi-pronged, systemic, and large scale, to create a visible impact. The Plastics Pacts model offers such a solution and is active in a number of countries including the U.K., South Africa, and Australia. It is now being brought to India by CII and WWF India.

The Plastics Pacts are business-led initiatives and transform the plastics packaging value chain for all formats and products. The Pacts bring together everyone from across the plastics value chain to implement practical solutions. All Pacts unite behind four targets: to eliminate unnecessary and problematic plastic packaging through redesign and innovation; to ensure all plastic packaging is reusable or recyclable; to increase the reuse, collection, and recycling of plastic packaging; and to increase recycled content in plastic packaging.

The India Plastics Pact, the first in Asia, will be launched in September

at the CII Annual Sustainability Summit. It can be expected to boost demand for recycled content, investments in recycling infrastructure, jobs in the waste sector, and beyond. The first Plastics Pact was launched in the U.K. in 2018, by WRAP, a global NGO based in the U.K., in partnership with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation. The U.K. Pact helped channel over £120 million worth of investments in recycling infrastructure resulting in 300,000 tonnes of new recycling capacity. The Pact will support the Extended Producer Responsibility framework of the government and improve solid waste management as envisioned in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Integral to the Pact's framework is the involvement of the informal waste sector crucial to post-consumer segregation, collection and processing of plastic waste. The India Plastics Pact is supported by WRAP, which supports many Pacts globally. This association will ensure access to expertise and knowledge from different Pacts worldwide.

The India Plastics Pact

The India Plastics Pact focuses on solutions and innovation. Members' accountability is ensured through ambitious targets and annual data reporting. The Pact will develop a road map for guidance, form action groups composed of members, and initiate innovation projects. While the India Plastics Pact will be active in India, it will link globally with other Plastics Pacts. Many Indian businesses and organisations have expressed an interest in signing up to the Pact. Deeper and long-lasting benefits will be felt across the supply chains of these businesses, most of which comprise MSMEs. The Pact will encourage development and maturing of the entire plastics production and management ecosystem. Apart from benefits to society and economy, delivering the targets will drive circularity of plastics and help tackle pollution. They will lead to significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

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