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Recommendations to the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on Plastic Pollution

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Faseel is a youth-led NGO that works on the principles of empowerment to achieve environmental sustainability through raising awareness, building capabilities, promoting local and international impactful environmental cooperation, and policy design and advocacy. Faseel is UNEP accredited as an observer NGO.

Reflection

At Faseel, we are privileged to constantly receive input and feedback from the public sector, the private sector and most importantly the community. Thus, we wanted to communicate our recommendations taking into account the role of each of these stakeholders.

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I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Plastics have become an integral part of our everyday lives, but their production and consumption come with severe environmental consequences due to their long-term adverse effects on the planet. Currently, Plastics have no readily deployable industrial and commercial scale substitute nor alternatives, given their economic value, properties, and uses across various industries, in addition to the direct and indirect economic impact that it has on the price of goods (especially for average everyday products and the healthcare sector). Hence, Plastic pollution has become a major global issue. We need to address the pollution issue from a comprehensive and inclusive standpoint and focus on innovative technologies and direct investments to overcoming waste management challenges and find solutions for managing this issue; however, while this is a long-term approach in the interim, we propose the following perspectives and recommendations.

II. PERSPECTIVES AND CORE OBLIGATIONS

1. Education and Awareness

Perspective

Creating an aware and educated community is a crucial step to limit further environmental pollution, biodiversity loss, and degradation. However, awareness goes beyond just community and involves every stakeholder.

Desired Outcome: Raised Awareness and Education on Plastic Pollution and Their Impact

Core obligations and implementation:

Governments - Integration of Educational curriculum elements to ensure the current and upcoming generations are well informed about the consequences of plastic pollution, and how to adopt better consumption and disposal practices. Furthermore, creating public educational forums and online educational packets that share a holistic view of the plastic waste challenge and share the current suggested solutions and best practices.

Private Sector - Funding awareness initiatives, or designing campaigns that communicate the message through ads, products, and social media which help shift social behaviors and raise awareness of responsible consumption and disposal methods for their customers. Moreover, adopting internal practices such as upcycling and reusing, and communicating their corporate social responsibility efforts both internally and externally can help raise awareness and manage their environmental impact.

Community - Adopt better practices on a personal level, lead and participate in socially driven campaigns.

2. Fostering Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI)

Perspective

Driving global scientific and technological innovation is crucial to solving our most persisting challenges. We need to progress with research, development, and innovation to tackle the issue of ending plastic pollution from a multi-dimensional perspective including improving plastics durability, recyclability, biodegradability, minimizing their environmental impact, and remediating impacted ecosystems including marine pollution and tackling micro-plastic pollution.

Desired Outcome: Setting and Communicating RDI Priorities, Solicit and Encourage Active Scientific Contribution, and Capitalization on Innovative Approaches.

Core obligations and implementation:

Governments

a. Embed aspects related to ending plastic pollution in their RDI priorities.

b. Incentivize scientific researchers, technology developers, and other stakeholders and institutions to undertake and participate in RDI efforts focusing on plastic pollution mitigation and alternatives.

c. Creating channels to solicit solutions and innovation from the public, and co-designing programs with third sector execution and private sector funding to filter and test solutions.

Private Sector, third sector, and community - Allocate funding, adopt and participate -each within their role- in the national RDI priorities on ending plastic pollutions.

3. Investment, Funding, and Incentives

Perspective

To have reliable and viable approaches on ending plastic pollution, we must create a strong ecosystem that cultivates innovative solutions and fosters the economic activities for plastic recycling, responsible consumption, and waste extraction methods. This can be achieved by having an impact driven source of funds for impactful solutions towards ending plastic pollution and empowering relevant stakeholders with the required tools , expertise and structures. Participating member states should consider the inclusion of such enabling factors in their National Action Plans (NAPs).

Desired Outcome: Build Strong Infrastructures, Improve the Current and Future Capacity To Handle the Waste and Pollution Challenge.

Core obligations and implementation:

Governments

a. Investing in the sustainability infrastructure, adopting circular economy approaches, including Circular Carbon Economy, and developing cities' strategies to achieve sustainable development and prioritize new economic activities where plastic waste can be reduced and recycled.

b. Creating incentive programs that encourage minimizing the plastic waste from producers to end-users and consumers, including corporations and individuals.

c. Finding sustainable and effective ways of subsidizing recycling activities which can help in increasing their volume and making recycling more accessible, feasible and viable.

Private Sector, Third Sector, and Community - Raise and secure funding while using their purchasing power to develop impactful partnerships, participate in and support responsible investment and more sustainably sound initiatives and approaches.

4. Promoting International Cooperation

Perspective

In facing global stressing challenges, international cooperation and unifying our efforts become essential. However, the process for fostering unity seems more difficult than ever in a globalized world with changing views and perspectives. Therefore, our ability to incorporate resilience into our tactics for collaboration will provide grassroots results to a global endeavor towards solving our challenges, including ending plastic pollution.

Desired Outcome: Inclusive, Improved, and Objective Multilateralism and International Cooperation

Core obligations and implementation:

Governments

a. Enhance inter-governmental coordination on risk reduction and addressing the issue of plastic pollution objectively and productively.

b. Channel and involve local stakeholders, including governmental entities, private sector, academic institutions, third sector, and the community, to bring their experiences and balanced views to the global community.

Private Sector, third sector, and community

a. Actively participate in related global forums.

b. Communicate challenges and priorities and sharing experiences and knowledge.

5. Standardization, Sector Development, and Value-Chain Integration

Perspective

Standardizing material use, general design, and disposal practices on a national (or even regional) level with the long-term goal of standardizing parts of the global supply chain, might help tackle many of the related negative impacts. This ensures that players throughout the supply chain (production, distribution, consumption, and disposal) can easily integrate, have better predictability, help minimize waste leakage. However, this should be done through open communication between all stakeholders to co-design the process and set standardization practices that are inclusive while considering the economic and societal impact.

Desired Outcome: Integrated, Efficient, and Standardized Supply-Chains.

Core obligations and implementation:

Governments

c. Solicit stakeholder feedback across the value chain before setting national and regional standards, and review existing ones, when possible, to regulate the interactions between players throughout the supply chain, including the informal waste sector.

d. Sector development for recycling can also help create jobs, as it encourages more people to enter the industry. This can lead to an increase in the number of people employed in the recycling sector and subsequent innovation in the industry which can help to boost the economy as well as mitigate the damage that would have been done to the environment.

Private Sector - Participate in the co-designing of the standards and share findings. In addition to implementing plastic closed-loop systems across their product offering, this includes the supply chains and procurement practices.

Third Sector and Community - Communicate concerns and share ideas during the standards co-design phase.

6. Regulations, Responsibilities, and Accountability

Perspective

A wide range of regulatory measures are being implemented, including bans on certain types of single-use plastics, taxes on plastic production, restrictions on the use of plastic bags and over-packaging. Usually, these measures are being imposed while not considering the full responsibilities of different players and stakeholders, and the impact on the most vulnerable. The public sector, the private sector, the third sector, and Individuals all have a role to play in reducing plastic pollution. All stakeholders must be responsible and held accountable for their practices and the impact of their socio-economic behaviors to have a coherent approach in tackling the plastic pollution challenge. Participating member states should consider the inclusion of such responsibilities and obligations in their National Action Plans (NAPs).

Desired Outcome: Responsible Producers and Consumers.

Core obligations and implementation:

Governments

a. Recognizing the need to regulate practices of plastic production and consumption with the aim to reduce plastic pollution across the value chain of the plastic lifecycle.

b. Implement measures that ensure economic circularity and promote efficiency in the use of resources needed to produce plastic products.

c. Intervening to shift negative social behaviors in plastic consumption and improve their waste disposal habits. This should yield a positive impact on both the environment and the quality of plastic waste as a feedstock to recycling facilities.

d. Auditing and monitoring the activities of plastic disposal and ensuring players' accountability.

Private Sector - Businesses must take a proactive approach to properly manage their plastic waste across their value chain, and collaborate with the public sector and other stakeholders in shaping and complying with their national regulations.

Third Sector and Community

a. The Third Sector mainly NPOs/NGOs has a great role to act as the catalyst of change as well as a mechanism to hold violators of environmental regulations accountable and drive discussions to create constructive pressure to help steer the progress toward an environmentally sustainable way of plastic consumption as well as facilitating the grants to drive RDI and support for innovators to help find efficient ways to dispose plastic waste and remediating damaged ecosystems.

b. It is essential that the third sector engages in the global agenda through various international frameworks, and then create a local movement, to help accelerate the adaptation of measures to reduce plastic pollution. As well as work with different levels of stakeholders to advocate for the creation of effective regulations and incentivize people as well as municipalities to implement environmentally positive waste disposal habits.

7. Looking Back and Moving Forward - Remediation & Mitigation

Perspective

While this instrument is focused on agreeing on terms to mitigate further environmental damage, we must also dedicate a section of the agreement, and portion of funding and support to remediate the actions and subsequent damage of years of negligent waste dumping from developed countries that has disproportionately affected the global south and small islands.

Desired Outcome: Remediate Past Actions and Mitigate Further Negative Impact.

Core obligations and implementation:

Governments - On a global level, ensure that developed countries adhere to their obligations and commitments regarding waste dumping and plastic pollution. Furthermore, on a local level, analyzing impacted locations and areas of concern, design, and review existing relevant policies, allocate fair-share remediation funding, then simplify the bureaucratic process to enable efforts for cleanup campaigns, such as simplifying permit issuing for waste picking and waiving entry or admin fees for cleaning excursions (such as waving entry fees to impacted national parks, or waive boat fees for marine cleanup excursions).

Private Sector - Allocate funds to direct social responsibility efforts aimed at addressing the environmental impacts through in-house or third-party remediation activities.

Third Sector - Create clear channels to provide logistical support and disseminate private sector funding to community & volunteering initiatives.

Community - Take agency to report impacted areas and organize and participate in cleanup activities.

Call To Action

We call upon the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), parties, and stakeholders involved in developing the legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, that the negotiations around the items of the intended instrument must be **Realistic, Fair, and Inclusive**. This could be achieved by focusing on the following:

1. Plastics have an undeniable added value. However, the improper handling of waste has led to catastrophic impact on the environment. We acknowledge the importance of reaching an agreement to end the waste but believe this instrument must be objective in viewing the problem and detached from any political agenda that might challenge our ability to reach a global consensus on ending plastic pollution.
2. International cooperation is essential, and the plastic waste pollution is global in its nature. However, this instrument should not come at the expense of impact on the local communities. Therefore, the inclusion of the community voices and the representation of their concerns, and their feedback to the suggested solutions prior to the signing of the agreement is crucial and will ensure a smoother adoption process.
3. The instrument should clearly reflect the responsibilities and roles of Governments, Private Sector, third sector as should be stated in the national action plans (NAPs), and community on ending plastic pollution.
4. The instrument should acknowledge the different dimensions and efforts aiming at ending plastic pollutions, including but not limited to:
    - Education and Awareness.
    - Fostering Research, Development, and Innovation (RDI).
    - Investment, Funding, and Incentives.
    - Promoting International Cooperation.
    - Standardizing, Sector development, and Value-chain integration.
    - Regulations, Responsibilities, and Accountability.
    - Looking back and Moving forward - Remediation & Mitigation.
5. Solutions to end plastic pollution must be feasible, viable and applicable, and consider the capabilities and essential needs of developing countries, the global south, and small islands. This might entail allocation of funding from developed to developing countries , open sourcing technology transfer, and protecting the right for economic prosperity of all member states and their ability to achieve their sustainable development ambitions by reflecting on environmental, economic, and social factors. Furthermore, the instrument should stress the importance of knowledge sharing and transfer between the parties, especially to developing countries and least developed countries to further improve their scientific and technological capabilities.

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