



GLOBAL PLASTICS TREATY - ENVIRONMENT PRELIMS AND GS III MAINS

Q. What are the challenges faced by the global nations in reaching agreement to arrest plastic pollution at the global level? Discuss how the proposed Global Plastics Treaty helps to address the same. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Remoulding the Global Plastics Treaty*

What's in the news?

- As discussions for an international legally binding treaty on plastic pollution continue, it is essential to consider how it can support a fair transition for informal waste collectors and recyclers

Observations by the OECD Global Plastic Outlook:

- In 2019, global plastic waste production was 353 million tonnes, more than double the amount in 2000. This number is expected to triple by 2060. Only 9% of plastic waste was recycled in 2019.
- 50% of plastic waste was sent to landfills, 19% incinerated, and 22% disposed of in uncontrolled sites or dumps.

Global Plastics Treaty:

- Global Plastics Treaty is an international treaty **legally binding agreement for plastics**.
- The resolution for this treaty was passed during the resumed fifth session of the **UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2)** in March 2022.

Objective:

- By the **end of 2024**, the aim is to create a legal document setting out deadlines for countries to **decrease plastic production, cut out unnecessary uses, prohibit specific chemicals, and set recycling goals**.
- It addresses the entire life cycle of plastics, including design, production, and disposal.

Members:

- It involves over **175 United Nations countries**.

Challenges in Reaching Agreement on Global Level:

1. Economic Impact on Oil Producers:

- Countries like Saudi Arabia, the US, and Russia, heavily reliant on the oil industry, fear strict limitations on plastic production could cripple their economies.

2. Lack of Specific Reduction Target:



- The proposed year of 2040 for plastic reduction is a point of contention.
- Some nations advocate for a faster timeline, while others push for a more gradual approach.

3. Voting vs Consensus:

- There's debate on the voting process for resolving treaty disputes
- It involves debate on whether contentious issues should be decided by majority vote or require agreement from all countries (effectively giving each a veto).

India's Stance on the Global Plastics Treaty:

- India is **not comfortable with binding targets** and insists that the treaty should address factors like the availability, accessibility, and affordability of alternatives, considering cost implications.
- India's position reflects the idea of "common but differentiated responsibility,". This is also observed in India's climate change negotiations where India demanded that wealthier nations assist developing countries and adopt tougher targets themselves.

Challenges due to Plastic Pollution:

1. Soil Pollution:

- Plastic waste can contaminate soil, reducing its fertility and affecting plant growth.

2. Marine Pollution:

- Plastic waste in oceans can harm marine life, alter habitats, and disrupt natural processes, making ecosystems less resilient to climate change.

3. Water Pollution:

- Plastic waste can contaminate groundwater and waterways, affecting human consumption and aquatic life.

4. Health Risks:

- **Microplastics** - Plastic waste can break down into microplastics, which can be ingested by humans and animals, potentially causing health problems.
- **Toxic Chemicals** - Plastic products can leach toxic chemicals, such as phthalates and BPA, into food and water, posing health risks

Way Forward:

1. Need for Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC):

- Established in 2021, the INC aims to create a legally binding agreement to reduce plastic pollution.
- The INC has held several meetings, with the final one scheduled in South Korea.



2. Promoting Informal Workers Participation:

- The International Alliance of Waste Pickers (IAWP) emphasizes the need to support and integrate informal waste pickers into the treaty discussions.
- Their historical contributions should be acknowledged, their rights protected, and their perspectives included in policy implementation.

3. Building Clarity:

- There is no universally agreed-upon terminology for a just transition or a formal definition of the informal waste sector. Clarifying these definitions is essential.

4. Role of India:

- India promotes repair, reuse, refill, and recycling without eliminating the use of plastics. This approach emphasizes country-specific circumstances and capacities.
- Rethinking EPR norms is crucial to integrating the informal worker cohort into the new legal framework.
- As a key representative from the Global South, India's perspectives and approaches are vital in shaping the Global Plastics Treaty.

By incorporating the perspectives of informal waste workers and ensuring their livelihoods are protected, the Global Plastics Treaty can embody social justice and equity principles, contributing to a sustainable future while leaving no one behind.