



GLOBAL PLASTICS TREATY - GS III MAINS

Q. What can the global plastics treaty entail? Examine the roadblocks to the treaty to bring out the sustainable world. (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *Plastic solution: Beyond the Global Plastics Treaty*

What's in the news?

- The Global Plastics Treaty, an ambitious initiative involving at least 175 United Nations member nations to eliminate the use of plastics, concluded its fourth round of negotiations recently.

Key takeaways:

- According to a report by the non-profit EA Earth Action, Brazil, China, India, and the US are responsible for 60% of plastic waste globally.

Global Plastics Treaty:

- The Global Plastics Treaty is an ambitious initiative involving over **175 UN member** nations aimed at eliminating plastics.

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.**

Need for Global Plastic Treaty:

1. Rapid Expansion of Plastic Production:

- Since the 1950s, plastic production worldwide has skyrocketed. It increased from just 2 million tonnes in 1950 to more than 450 million tonnes in 2019.
- If left unchecked, the production is slated to double by 2050, and triple by 2060.

2. Plastic Waste and Burden:

- Although plastic is a cheap and versatile material, with a wide variety of applications, its widespread use has led to a crisis.
- As plastic takes anywhere from 20 to 500 years to decompose, and less than 10% has been recycled till now, nearly 6 billion tonnes now pollute the planet, according to a 2023 study published by The Lancet.
- About 400 million tonnes of plastic waste is generated annually, a figure expected to jump by 62% between 2024 and 2050.
- Much of this plastic waste leaks into the environment, especially into rivers and oceans, where it breaks down into smaller particles (microplastic or nanoplastic).



- These contain more than 16,000 chemicals that can harm ecosystems and living organisms, including humans, the chemicals are known to disturb the body's hormone systems, cause cancer, diabetes, reproductive disorders, etc.

3. Climate Change:

- Plastic production and disposal are also contributing to climate change. According to a report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in 2019, plastics generated 1.8 billion tonnes of GHG emissions (3.4% of global emissions).
- Roughly 90% of these emissions come from plastic production, which uses fossil fuels as raw material. If current trends continue, emissions from production could grow 20% by 2050.

Proposed Provisions of Global Plastic Treaty:

1. Global Objectives:

- The treaty aims to address marine and other types of environmental pollution caused by plastics.
- It focuses on establishing global objectives to combat plastic pollution and assess its impact on ecosystems.

2. Guidelines for International Cooperation:

- The treaty may outline how wealthier nations can support poorer ones in achieving their plastic reduction goals.

3. Prohibitions and Targets:

- It could include bans on specific plastics, products, and chemical additives, along with legally binding targets for recycling and recycled content in consumer goods.

4. Chemical Testing Mandates:

- The treaty might require the testing of certain chemicals present in plastics to ensure safety and environmental protection.

5. Consideration for Vulnerable Workers:

- Details may be included regarding a just transition for waste pickers and workers in developing countries reliant on the plastic industry for livelihoods.

6. Progress Assessment:

- The treaty will include provisions for assessing member states' progress in implementing plastic pollution reduction measures.
- Regular evaluations will ensure accountability and drive continuous improvement in global efforts to combat plastic pollution.

Challenges and Delays:

1. Economic Challenges:



- Economic challenges are slowing down the agreement process. Countries like Saudi Arabia, the US, Russia, India, and Iran are reluctant to set strict deadlines to stop plastic production whereas some African countries, backed by several European nations, propose a target year of around 2040 to ensure a gradual reduction in plastic use.

2. Vote vs. Consensus:

- There is disagreement on whether contentious issues should be resolved by vote or consensus. Consensus implies that every country has a veto and in this case adoption of the treaty will become very difficult.

3. High-Ambition Coalition vs. US Stance:

- The "High Ambition Coalition (HAC) to End Plastic Pollution," comprising approximately 65 nations including African nations and most of the European Union, advocates for ambitious goals such as ending plastic pollution by 2040 and phasing out problematic single-use plastics and harmful chemical additives.
- The US, although expressing a desire to end plastic pollution by 2040, diverges from the coalition's approach by promoting voluntary measures instead of binding commitments.

4. Influence of Industry Interests:

- Fossil fuel and chemical corporations are actively working to dilute the treaty's effectiveness, as evidenced by the record number of lobbyists.
- These industries, which profit heavily from plastics derived from fossil fuels, oppose production cuts and falsely assert that the plastics crisis is solely a waste management issue, rather than acknowledging the fundamental problem of plastic production itself.

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.

To effectively combat plastic pollution, there needs to be significant investment in developing and scaling affordable alternatives to plastics. Policies should also focus on enhancing recycling technologies, improving waste management systems, and fostering global cooperation to reduce dependency on plastics.