

JUST TRANSITION AND INCLUSION

OVERCOMING SOCIO-ECONOMIC BARRIERS AND DRIVING A CIRCULAR TRANSITION FOR A GLOBAL PLASTICS TREATY

Social inclusion is necessary for economic just transition, along the full plastics value chain, to create a circular economy. A just transition framed within a human-rights-based approach offers opportunities for all. Beyond the climate context, there are intersections between environmental concerns, biodiversity protection, and achieving just transitions across a variety of sectors linked to plastics and the full plastics value chain.

A socially inclusive just transition is the key to achieving synergies with the Paris Agreement NDCs (UNDP, 2022), the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and the creation of holistic policies and measures which work towards social, environmental, and economic integration ambitions.

The global plastics treaty should elevate just transition from a secondary consideration to a core guiding framework for the circular transition by integrating holistic, ethical solutions benefiting people and planet. This can be done through the retention of the proposed, dedicated article on just transitions in the treaty text as well as by mainstreaming just transitions throughout the treaty text, from binding and voluntary requirements to reporting, oversight and compliance mechanisms.

WHAT IS JUST TRANSITION TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY?

The ILO definition of a just transition includes, “greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind.” The following are key concepts for just transition:

- Maximize the impact of climate action with a frame of just transition for society to create improved conditions for workers (both formal and informal), marginalized and vulnerable groups (including women and youth) and their communities by engaging stakeholders in social dialogue to define and implement holistic policies to close material loops while ensuring decent work and equality for all, as noted in the Yunus Environment Hub report, Just Transition for an Inclusive Circular Economy (2024). This has impacts far beyond the climate action sphere and can provide models for application to the plastics lifecycle.
- Move from a take, make, dispose economy and reducing plastic production and dependency on fossil fuels as well as plastic-intensive industries. For example, support for these measures can be seen in the caps on production that are now supported by many countries including the USA.³
- Engage with the informal sector to avoid the potential for unemployment and poverty stemming from official efforts to regulate aspects of the economy to meet environmentally based goals, as this sector plays a significant part in collection and other aspects of national economies.

WHO BENEFITS FROM JUST TRANSITION TO CIRCULAR PLASTICS ECONOMY?

- Which groups tend to be left behind in partnerships? Inclusive development principles and human-rights-based approaches are highlighted and used as best practice. This includes gender inclusivity as well as linking underserved and disadvantaged groups to the need for a balanced circular economy.
- The informal sector provides an important function in the circular economy across the entire plastics lifecycle: providing economic opportunities to those who are otherwise vulnerable or unable to participate in the formal sector.



THE CASE FOR JUST TRANSITION

- Policy alignment at national, regional and global levels including EPR schemes
- Social equity and inclusivity
- Environmental impacts, links to protection of biodiversity, advancing the GBF targets
- Economic viability through inclusive models to drive regenerative and social business



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the report “Towards a Sustainable Future: Recommendations for a Just Transition in Waste Management and Circular Economy in the ASEAN Region” (2024) that Yunus Environment Hub conducted on behalf of GIZ.

For Government/Polymakers/Labour associations

- Embed just transition principles into legislation and regulations.
- Acknowledge workers' rights and actively involve them in policy development, including members of the formal and informal sectors.
- Create multi-stakeholder advisory committees to guide just transition policy development and implementation across law, regulatory measures and policy measures.
- Perform comprehensive impact assessments, including environmental, socio-economic and related factors to identify vulnerable sectors and communities, their needs and concerns.
- Implement targeted support programs for MSMEs to adopt circular economy practices.
- Foster partnerships between local agencies, regional cooperation bodies, and communities to co-design contextualized knowledge on best practices for achieving a just transition.
- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns to build public understanding and support for just transition measures.



For Waste Management Companies/Municipalities/NGOs/Communities

- Implement inclusive business models that provide decent work opportunities for informal waste workers.
- Advocate for the inclusion of just transition principles in EPR schemes.
- Monitor and report on the social and environmental impacts of waste management practices on local communities.
- Strengthen the interaction between the community and the private sector, including direct collaboration to ensure actors in the plastics industry bear responsibility for their products and potential waste.
- Initiate consumers' behaviour changes about consumption, use and disposal of single-use plastic products, contributing to initiating their phase out through replacement by sustainable alternatives.
- Implement community-based actions for waste processing and entrepreneurship before it reaches a recycling facility or landfill.
- Engage communities in the conversion of plastic waste through inclusive recycling, upcycling/ downcycling and/or energy recovery measures.



For Businesses/Multinationals

- Integrate just transition principles into corporate sustainability strategies and policies.
- Develop and implement supplier codes of conduct that incorporate just transition principles and requirements.
- Partner with education and training institutions to develop curricula and programs for green skills and jobs.
- Engage in multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives to scale up just transition efforts across industries and regions.
- Invest in the development and deployment of green technologies that create decent work opportunities in the circular economy.
- Include socially focused businesses in procurement processes and supply chains.
- Commit to reskilling and hiring of workers, formal and/or informal, from sectors where income opportunities have been made obsolete.



CALL TO ACTION

Yunus Environment Hub and IUCN are actively seeking opportunities to implement small scale pilot projects to demonstrate the practical application of just transition principles. Pilots can identify barriers, opportunities, and gather data in a cost-effective manner, and provide a foundation for best practice sharing. By using the roadmap and recommendations, including social indicators, implementing partners can develop and adopt just transition standards and KPIs to evaluate and measure aspects of success to determine social, environmental and economic impact.

FURTHER READING

1. GIZ Regional Project, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle to Protect the Marine Environment and Coral Reefs (3RproMar), 2024. *Towards a Sustainable Future: Recommendations for a Just Transition in Waste Management and Circular Economy in the ASEAN Region*. Available at <https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2024-en-just-transition-report.pdf>
2. UNDP Climate Promise, 2022. *Issue Brief: Incorporating Just Transition into the design and implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions and Long-Term Strategies*. Sangji Lee, Available at https://climatepromise.undp.org/sites/default/files/research_report_document/Just%20Transition%20Issue%20Brief_0.pdf

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