



Countries Agree to Turn Tide on Plastic Pollution in Ambitious Global Treaty

Heads of state, environment ministers and other representatives from 175 countries, on 2 March, endorsed a historic resolution to end plastic pollution, and forge an international legally binding agreement, by the end of 2024.

The landmark resolution at the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-5.2) that took place in Nairobi addresses and explicitly references circular economy, full life cycle and sustainable production and consumption, including its production, design and disposal.

The use of single-use plastics has contributed to much of this type of pollution. Plastic production has risen exponentially in the past decades, and it now amounts to some 400 million tons per year, a figure that is set to double by 2040. The UNEA Treaty was developed to tackle these kinds of setbacks on the environment by bringing in 175 member states to endorse this landmark agreement.

“The indiscriminate pollution of our oceans which threatens food chains and ocean, and lake-based communities should be of grave concern to legislators. There is a need to take immediate action towards harmonising policies to ensure we successfully tackle plastic pollution in the region,” says Karim Anjarwalla, Managing Partner, ALN Kenya.

UNEA has for the first time been able to adopt a negotiation mandate for a new legally binding multilateral environment agreement. The overarching reference of this resolution is based around the circular economy, full life cycle and sustainable production and consumption. The treaty magnifies the importance of promoting a circular design of products and materials so that they can be reused, recycled or remanufactured hence retained in the economy for as long as possible along with the resources they are made of, as well as minimising the generation of waste.

Uniting for Change

With equal focus on education awareness, innovative solutions and advocacy at a regional and global level, efforts by ALN in partnership with The Flipflopi Project stand a chance of turning the tide on plastic pollution as they lay the groundwork for the adoption of streamlined legislation and collaborative action within the East African Community. A report titled ‘East Africans: Let’s Unite for Change’, released by ALN Kenya together with The Flipflopi Project and Sustainable Inclusive Business uncovers the need to adopt streamlined legislation to manage plastic pollution throughout the East African Community (EAC).

“This initiative [the Flipflopi project] provides a platform to spark and encourage conversations around the dangers of single-use plastic to our environment and to increase public awareness of the

impact of plastic pollution as a means to change people's daily habits by eliminating and reducing waste from single-use plastic products," says Rosa Nduati-Mutero, Partner, ALN Kenya.

The Resolutions Adopted

The UNEA treaty encourages action from both the private and public sector and calls upon member states to step up their activities. These types of activities promote cooperation at the global, regional, national and local levels which enables the recognition of strengthening governance and coordination regarding to taking immediate actions. So, what are the major resolutions that were adopted?

Resolution to End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument

This resolution has rightly identified the transboundary nature of plastic pollution and it has recommended joint actions at the global, regional and local levels. It recognises the need for enhanced collaboration on capacity building, green technology, and technical and scientific cooperation to ensure the sustainable design and use of plastic products.

Resolution on an Enhancing Circular Economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production.

This resolution is based on the world continuing to develop practical solutions regarding a circular economy as one of the sustainable development models. The resolution also emphasizes the full life cycle of materials from production, design to waste management and prevention and the coherence and coordination of activities globally, regionally and nationally. This resolution also focuses on means of implementation including technology transfer, finance and capacity building.

"To address plastic waste pollution at source, we need to fundamentally rethink the way we design, use and reuse plastics. The Kenya Plastics Pact, for instance, brings together stakeholders from across the whole plastics value chain to transform the current linear plastics system into a circular economy for plastics which keeps them in use and out of the environment," says Karin Boomsma, Director, Sustainable Inclusive Business Project.

Resolution on Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure

The resolution on sustainable and resilient infrastructure encourages member states to adopt environmental considerations in all their infrastructure plans. The focus is also on sustainable housing which is one of the areas that is under development in developing countries. Huge tracts of riparian land and water catchment areas are being cleared to pave way for development and this creates a threat to biodiversity.

Resolution on Nature-based Solutions (NbS) for Supporting Sustainable Development

The resolution on Nature-based Solutions for Supporting Sustainable Development also calls on UNEP to support the implementation of NbS, which safeguards the rights of communities and indigenous peoples. The definition of NbS has its basis around actions to protect, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified water systems.

The report has emphasised the collective responsibility needed in matters concerning the environment. Therefore, most of these activities need to be achieved from the basic level which is the local level to the more dynamic and sophisticated level which is the global level. The various states involved in this agreement have begun taking various steps towards achieving a circular economy as part of their sustainable development goals agenda. African countries have started the work but there are several constraints that need to be overcome regarding financing and creating awareness for the circular economy.

“Without any proper waste management systems, we will be forced to take our own action on plastic pollution. By better understanding the problematic plastics, we can contribute to the action plan for the development of a sustainable waste management system,” says Ali Skanda – Co-Founder of the Flipflop Project.

Sources

Ellen MacArthur Foundation | UNEP | The Flipflop Project |
New Scientist