Making it Happen

Developing a Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution

Negotiations to develop a Global Plastics Treaty are at a crossroads.

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) will convene in mid-2025 to attempt to consummate an agreement against the backdrop of an ever-worsening plastic pollution crisis.

Key outstanding issues in negotiations are the inclusion of upstream and midstream control measures and the overall design of a financial framework to support developing countries.

This briefing explores the role philanthropy can play in unlocking political will to get deal done and setting the early agenda, in particular via the development of a Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution.

Background

Addressing plastic pollution requires significant coordination and multiple interventions across the full lifecycle of plastic, centered around a clear overarching objective.

Alongside this, considerable resources must be made available, particularly to developing countries, communities at the forefront of the crisis and organisations that will define the early work under the global plastics treaty.

While a global plastics treaty is the great enabler, galvanising action at the international, regional, national and sub-national levels and across the economy, it will not achieve all that is necessary to end plastic pollution. This will be determined by the collective energy brought to the issue – something philanthropy is well-placed to influence.

To this end, philanthropy should draw inspiration from the role it played during negotiations on the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, in particular from its creation of the Kigali Cooling Efficiency Programme.

The Kigali Cooling Efficiency Programme, now the Clean Cooling Collaborative, was launched in 2016 by 18 leading philanthropic climate foundations, pledging $52 million to support developing countries in transitioning from super-greenhouse gases known as hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) to energy-efficient and climate-friendly alternatives.

The announcement of this funding, plus an additional $27 million by government donors, came in advance of the meeting in Kigali, Rwanda at a delicate time during those negotiations. It is widely regarded as a key contributor towards the unblocking of negotiations and reaching a final agreement.

Equally importantly, though, was that philanthropy, through the Clean Cooling Collaborative, seized control of the narrative with investment in early action on energy efficiency and the transition to alternatives in the cooling sector, in particular natural refrigerants (although sometimes lower-global warming potential (GWP) hydrofluorocarbons as well).

To this day, energy efficiency and natural refrigerants are key aspects of the post-Kigali Amendment body of work and significant advances have been made on each front – in no small part due to philanthropy's investment in early action on these topics.

Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution

In thinking about the role philanthropy can play in the context of the global plastic treaty, two main aspects merit consideration.

Firstly, similar to the Kigali Amendment, the announcement of joint philanthropic funding could foster resolve to get the deal done. This can be advanced by committing the funding to developing countries which support ambition in the treaty and commit to early action – both in terms of support to governments and civil-society.

Secondly, joint philanthropic funding could be used to create energy and activity around policy priorities, much as the Kigali Cooling Efficiency Programme did for energy efficiency and climate-friendly refrigerants.

Examples of potential policy priorities include:

- **Define Ambition**. The Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution, by setting its own ambition, would set the tone for the global ambition in the global plastics treaty. To date, what question of what global ambition should be set, if any, is subject to much dispute. For example, Rwanda and Peru proposed that the treaty should seek to achieve a 40 per cent reduction in global plastic production by 2040 against a 2025 baseline – also known as "40x40." This would reduce annual plastic demand by 341 million tonnes versus business-as-usual, avoiding the production of 2.7 billion tonnes over 25 years. Implementing the 40x40 target would bring the plastics industry closer in line with its carbon budget rather than exceeding it by more than 360 per cent, as is currently projected (see here). However, other countries oppose any reference to a global target on plastic production, as well as consumption, and it is unclear whether (i) a target-setting process will be in the final agreement, despite being supported by more than 100 countries and (ii) whether the lack of target-setting process will to loom over early implementation, as it did for climate and biodiversity. The Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution, by selecting 40x40 as its ambition and investing in early action to achieve it, would define ambition, making it a de facto if not de jure global target.

- **Focus on upstream and midstream, not downstream**. The Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution could ensure a focus on upstream and midstream interventions, making them key components of national plans regardless of the legal nature (voluntary or mandatory) of any control measures. In other words, although much is still undecided in the negotiations, national plans are sure to be included. This means policymakers will need to identify interventions across the lifecycle of plastics, creating advocacy opportunities for philanthropy and civil society, especially in the context of early action and creating a culture within the global plastic treaty. The Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution could invest in upstream and midstream interventions, such as eliminating polymers and chemicals, reducing plastic use and implementing sustainable alternatives such as reuse and refill systems, repair initiatives and deposit-return schemes, shifting the focus of early action away from plastic-waste management towards sustainable production and consumption patterns. Much as energy efficiency took on a life of its own at the Montreal Protocol through strategic advocacy and investment — the Multilateral Fund for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol now funds energy-efficiency policy development and further established a $120 million funding window for investment projects — one could envision knock-on implications for the global plastics treaty.

- **Focus on priority sectors**. The Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution could initiate dedicated programmes of work to develop and implement comprehensive global strategies for specific sectors. This would, similarly, have knock-on implications for the global plastics treaty. Norway proposed draft text that would establish dedicated programmes for specific sectors, including packaging, fisheries, agriculture and textiles. The fate of this provision is unclear but, regardless of its inclusion in the final agreement, strategic investment by philanthropy could initiate de facto dedicated programmes of work for priority sectors, thereby making them a significant part of the early body of work under the global plastics treaty.

Conclusion

To be effective, philanthropy must often look beyond the horizon and around corners to seize opportunities that are not readily visible to others.

The Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) believes a Fast Action Fund to End Plastic Pollution could be one such opportunity, with the potential to unblock negotiations and define the early body of work under the global plastics treaty. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the issue in further detail, including any modalities and strategies on its design, priorities and roll-out to ensure maximum impact.

environmental investigation agency

62-63 Upper Street, London, N1 0NY, UK
eia-international.org
+44 (0)20 7354 7960