



Trade and the Circular Economy: A Deep Dive into Plastics Action in South Africa

Initial Scoping for White Paper

Background

The World Economic Forum's Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP) was forged as a platform to bring together public, private, and civil society actors to address global plastic waste and pollution. Recognizing the urgency to catalyse concerted solutions, the platform was launched in September 2018, with the overarching goal to translate commitments to address plastic pollution into tangible strategies and investible actions plans. GPAP works to drive impact at two levels: global and national. To date, GPAP has established National Plastic Action Partnerships (NPAP) in five countries: Indonesia, Viet Nam, Ghana, Nigeria and Pakistan. These locally driven platforms are forging national and regional networks to develop a blueprint for action while coalescing the right actors to operationalize the action plan.

Since production and consumption patterns are global, GPAP is also working with the Forum's Future of Trade and Investment Platform to understand plastics value chains. Plastic and plastic waste flows, along with trade barriers that may hold back pollution reduction strategies, were identified through a community [white paper](#) issued by the World Economic Forum in July 2020.

The report examines where trade policy could help stakeholders' efforts to shift to cost-efficient, sustainable plastic alternatives and boost better end-of-life management including through recycling and circular approaches. The release was timely given implementation from January 2021 by parties to the Basel Convention – an international treaty designed to reduce the movements of hazardous and other types of waste between nations – of an amendment to include most types of plastic waste under controlled trade processes. The move adds further context to considerations around circular plastics strategies.

The global report demonstrated that it is vital to understand how national plastic pollution action strategies can be strengthened through cooperation. It will also be important to unpack at a national level the availability of sustainable plastic alternatives, inclusive industry transition opportunities, impacts on exports, and other key questions linked to economic development. Greater linkages are therefore needed on the interface between global flows and national efforts. Building on this work GPAP undertook a pilot [country level analysis](#) in Ghana. Published in August 2021 it outlines Ghana's local plastics value chain, international trade considerations, and tailored trade agenda for the country's policymakers.

GPAP is now seeking to build a broader programme on the role of value chains in advancing the circular economy for plastics within and across nations. By supporting national efforts to understand their plastic value chain, the sustainable plastics strategies of both global and local companies, and trade related interventions, new solutions can be advanced. Based on government demand and a progressive policy on the management of plastic waste, GPAP is now undertaking a country level analysis in South Africa.



Objectives and Deliverables

Together with the Forum's Future of Trade and Investment Platform GPAP seeks to deliver a white paper exploring South Africa's plastics value chain, and the corresponding challenges and opportunities for trade to serve as a lever for the circular economy.

South Africa joined the Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Plastic Pact Network to stimulate innovation, dialogue, and collaboration to unlock barriers to circularity, create new business models and generate job opportunities. Like GPAP's National Plastic Action Partnerships, the Pact brings together key actors from the local plastics value chain, the South African Government, PROs, NGOs and other stakeholders. The Pact has established ambitious targets, including for 100% of plastic packaging to be reusable, recyclable, or compostable by 2025.

The white paper will explore the trade related opportunities and challenges for South Africa as part of its National Waste Management Strategy 2020 and its broader circular economy objectives. Ultimately, the white paper aims to highlight a holistic set of trade and investment policy options that consider the interface of local and global value chains. It will also highlight opportunities for greater synergies in technical assistance and public-private initiatives. The private sector targeted should cover the full extent of the plastics value chain from upstream plastic producers, mid-stream users and downstream waste collectors, giving due consideration to the informal economy. Trade policy solutions examined may be both unilateral or regional, including, but not limited to, collaboration through the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU) and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Consideration should be given to concepts of equity, fairness and distributive justice relating to global North-South trade relations and so-called "waste colonialism".¹

Timeline

GPAP seeks to commence this work no later than 1 February, with a preliminary outline and initial findings delivered by 1 March. A complete, first draft is expected by 15 April, which will be followed by a comprehensive expert review by actors in the trade and plastics action communities at the World Economic Forum. The final draft will be due no later than 15 June.

Three workshops are also anticipated: 1) initial consultation prior to undertaking research, 2) stakeholder consultation / expert review in e.g., May, and 3) a presentation of findings post-publication. The workshops fall outside of the remit of the white paper scope and will be coordinated concurrently.

Contact

For further information or to express interest in leading the development of this white paper please contact Taylor Clayton taylor.clayton@weforum.org and include: a) CV, b) relevant writing sample(s) and c) daily rate in USD no later than **15 January 2021**.

¹ The term waste colonialism was first recorded in February 1989 at the United Nations Environmental Programme Basel Convention working group when African nations articulated concerns about the disposal of hazardous wastes by high GDP countries into low GDP countries. That is, high GDP countries like those in Europe and North America were accessing African land for inexpensive disposal of waste. <https://discardstudies.com/2018/11/01/waste-colonialism/>, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10784-020-09479-3>, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/asia-stands-up-to-waste-colonialism/>