



“Just Transition” under the Plastics Treaty Agenda

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Plastics Treaty Background

- In May 2022, the governing body for the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA), met and decided to authorize efforts to make an international agreement on plastic pollution.
 - This was adopted as the UNEA Resolution 5/14
 - It is intended to cover all types of plastic pollution, including in the marine environment



Plastics Treaty Background



- Important to remember that this is not only for marine environment but for all environments.
- The UNEA Resolution invited all countries to join the negotiation.
- This means that all countries will be able to offer insights, opinions and suggestions for the text of a treaty.
- Under the current operating rules, the hope is that the text will be agreed by consensus, which means that all countries will come to a negotiated agreement on the end result.



Plastics Treaty Background

- Negotiations will take place at set intervals and will be hosted by different countries in each round.
- INC-1 took place at the end of November 2022 in Uruguay
- INC-2 took place in May 2023 in Paris
- INC-3 will take place in Nairobi during the week of 13 Nov 2023
- INC-4 and INC-5 will take place in 2024

Just Transitions Background

- Historically, just transition is most often equated with labour rights movements.
- From that point onward, just transition has spread and moved beyond one country or industry.
- While it is still tied to the coal sector, it has been diversified to include fossil fuels generally, and to balance efforts at transitioning away from high-carbon fuels.
- Just transition is a larger concept, however, and can be translated across a variety of sectors and issue areas with thorough legal and regulatory measures.
- Just transition should also be understood as a necessary legal and policy tool through which to facilitate labour and employment transitions at all levels of an industry or entity produced.



Just Transitions and the Plastics Treaty

- In the Plastics Treaty negotiations to date, much focus on transitions has been focused on the informal sector and especially waste pickers.
- At the same time, it must be remembered that just transition in the plastic pollution context is a broader issue and includes workers at all phases of the plastics life-cycle, i.e.:
 - Engineers and chemists who are specialized in plastic production
 - Those producing plastics and plastics-containing elements
 - Those using plastic products in the course of their employment and
 - Those who work in waste management.



Just Transitions and the Plastics Treaty

- In the context of the full plastics life-cycle, including just transitions in the Plastics Treaty language would require actions at the international, national and sub-national levels.
- These legal and regulatory efforts should focus on not only the individuals losing their jobs but also their families and communities since there are impacts across these layers.
- In the plastics context, this will be particularly critical for those engaged in the informal economy, such as waste pickers, who are often at the margins of society to begin with and frequently are women, children, those in extreme poverty or Indigenous peoples.
- Transitions and responses to them will require tailoring to the communities in which they are taking place to avoid entrenching discrimination against women, the poor, and members of marginalized communities.



Just Transitions and the Plastics Treaty

- Previous just transitions efforts in the coal sector have demonstrated the need to address issues not directly connected with re-education or training, especially domestic violence and abuse that can come with economic stress in a household.
- At the same time, care must be taken to ensure that the legal requirements of the Plastics Treaty are beneficial for all impacted sectors, including through:
 - Educational and vocational assistance
 - Protections for those who would transition to working with plastic substitutes and alternatives, for example those in the production and waste management sectors.
 - Efforts at just transition in the context of the Plastics Treaty could benefit from exploring synergies with other treaty systems addressing transitions.

