



INDIAN OCEAN
COMMISSION



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Regional and national action plan to prevention, reduction,
and control of marine plastic pollution in African
and Indian Ocean Island States

Executive statement

Marine plastic pollution (MPP) is growing in African and Indian Ocean island states, and worldwide. There are numerous social, economic, and environmental impacts. Those impacts are complex, cumulative, largely irreversible, and difficult to quantify. Multiple actions across the entire plastics value chain with greater commitments by business stakeholders and concerted international actions, included in global, regional, and national actions plans are required to prevent, reduce and control MPP. Those action plans should include a trade dimension, help access resources and finance, help establish multilevel position on MPP and should foster development of a binding agreements on measures to combat MPP.

Fast facts

- MPP is growing rapidly. Impacts are cumulative and irreversible.
- The main source is mismanaged solid waste. MPP cause global losses of overs \$2billion/year.
- Annual plastic consumption of over 450,000 tonnes in 2010 and import over \$400 million each year.
- 12.7 million tonnes (metric) per year, of which microplastics, particles smaller than 5 mm (and even smaller nano plastics) account for around 20%.
- 550,000 tonnes of particles smaller than 0.01 mm are deposited every year, almost half of them ending up in the ocean. Over 80,000 tonnes fall on isolated areas covered in ice and snow, risking further melting as the dark particles absorb the sun's heat.
- Every year, over 200,000 tonnes of tiny plastic particles are blown from roads into the oceans.
- Up to 28% of microplastics in the oceans come from tires, which shed their synthetic rubber as they wear.
- Over 1.6 billion new tires are manufactured every year, and around billion used tires are generated. 100 million tires a year are processed by the recycling industry.
- Barriers to trade in plastic waste are likely to increase. There are no global norms for managing land-based sources of MPP.
- Shipping is obliged to manage plastic waste.
- Several regional seas convention have marine litter management plans.

Regional action plans to combat marine plastic pollution.

In anticipation of a global treaty on plastics many regions are implementing regional action plans to combat plastic pollution. Marine litter action plans are under discussion by the Regional Seas Conventions, the Abidjan, and Nairobi Conventions. However, the marine litter action plans address only part of the larger 'plastics problem', which has been extensively discussed by the African Union and an African plastics policy assessment has been prepared. In 2020, a decision of the African Ministers Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) on plastic pollution identified key actions to be supported nationally and regionally, including the establishment of an African Group of Negotiators on the plastics treaty and a call for financing national and regional priority actions (AMCEN, Dakar, 2022).

Current situation

A global, regional, and national challenge. African and Indian Ocean Island States, SIDS and the African Union all recognize the problem of plastic pollution and its impacts on oceans and the environment. African countries are already collaborating on negotiations on a global treaty on plastics to combat the problem. A treaty may take several years to negotiate, but countries and regions need to act now and cooperated to curb this growing problem.

There is growing public awareness of the costs of plastic pollution and marine plastic pollution (MPP) in particular. At global level the costs are conservatively estimated to be at least \$500 billion annually, including the growing contribution of plastics to global GHG emissions. While similar estimates are not available for Sub-Saharan Africa or for African and Indian Ocean island states, the cost of MPP to South Africa alone was recently estimated to be over \$700 million per year. These costs are mainly attributed to loss of ecosystem function, losses to tourism, to shipping, and to fisheries. There is also growing concern that the accumulated plastic pollution may affect human health and food supplies and the quality of drinking water of future generations. Without concerted action, the level of MPP is projected to grow by about 75% by 2040.

Plastics life cycle and the circular blue economy. Africa's negotiators of the global plastics treaty recognise that marine plastic pollution (MPP) is part of a larger plastic pollution and waste management problem which involves the entire plastics life cycle - from production of raw material through improved design of plastic products to management of wastes, including through development of a circular economy for plastics. They recognise that despite an increasing demand for plastics and plastic products, a reduction in production of raw plastic is required; elimination, or reduction of un-necessary plastics including many single-use-plastic products is necessary; and that the environmental costs of plastics need to be reflected in the price of plastics. Decision-makers are aware that while the 'plastics problem' stretches well beyond ocean affairs, the blue economy has an important role in addressing plastic pollution from fisheries, shipping, coastal tourism and from coastal cities. The oceans also provide an important focus for advocacy and actions to combat MPP and plastic pollution in general.

All necessary measures. There is wide consensus that no single measure will resolve the 'plastics problem' but that all available means must be deployed to make an effective impact. These include regulations, taxes, harmonized trade rules, investment in solid waste management and in the circular economy. Extended producer responsibility schemes, enhanced public awareness and, changed consumer and industry behaviour are all required. There is a shared understanding that countries, regional economic communities, and industry must act together to build common consensus and implement coordinated measures along the entire plastic life cycle, including monitoring of MPP.

Marine plastic pollution at regional level. The AIODIS annually generates an estimated 6,550 tons of marine plastic pollution and over 90% of this plastic is imported. The African mainland countries generate levels which are orders of magnitude greater. For example, the east African mainland countries (excluding Somalia) generate at least 150,000 tons of marine plastic pollution annually, or more than 25 times the estimated 5,800 tons generated by the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) island states.

Regional coordination. There is a growing understanding that in addition to a global treaty, coordinated actions are required at the level of the regional economic communities, in the large marine ecosystems, in the ocean basins or other unit that can coordinate efforts at scale. Regional action plans are being implemented in many regional seas or by economic groups, e.g., in the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, by the EU, by ASEAN and by South Asian countries. The East African Community already has common regulations on some plastic products.

Regional initiatives: West Africa and Western Indian Ocean action plans

Parallel action plans. At the request of the AIODIS Focal Points, the Indian Ocean Commission has prepared two parallel proposals for regional action plans to combat marine plastic pollution: for the West Africa/ Abidjan Convention region; the other for the Western Indian Ocean/ Nairobi Convention region. The proposals are intended as a basis for dialogues by the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), the Regional Seas Conventions and African representatives to the plastics treaty negotiations. The proposals are intended to foster consensus on priority regional cooperation actions to address marine plastic pollution and plastic pollution more generally. The rationale for twin plans is that there are different RECs, different oceans and different regional seas conventions involved in east and west Africa, while the parallel nature of the plans can facilitate integration at AU level.

Pillars of the twin action plans. Each proposed action plan has four pillars:

- support for development and implementation of national action plans as core building blocks
- enhanced shared regional knowledge and capacity, including scientific advice, monitoring of plastic pollution and development of a circular plastics economy.

- development of regional alignment on:
- trade measures and national regulations on plastics
- responsibilities of industry (e.g., regional extended producer responsibility schemes)
- regional consensus positions on the plastic treaty, in the WTO Committee on Environment and other fora
- access to affordable finance to implement national action plans, including developing a circular plastics economy, raising awareness, improved solid waste management and other actions planned at national and regional level.

Partnerships

The proposed action plans require several closely related partnerships: (i) on regional cooperation, (ii) on financing priority actions and (iii) on cooperation with industry.

Effective cooperation mechanisms are required between countries to agree upon and implement priority actions in each region to agree upon and implement priority actions. This cooperation can be effectively structured through existing regional platforms such as the RECs, the Regional Seas Conventions or through other functional arrangements. For example, COMESA parliamentarians have already discussed enhanced alignment of customs and trade arrangements for plastics.

Access to affordable finance. National action plans require finance. As part of the WIO Regional Ocean Governance Strategy (under development) discussions are under way to bridge the gap between supply of and demand for affordable blue finance. The concept is to create a regional blue portfolio of similar investments (such as for solid waste management) to create economies of scale, leverage different sources of finance, reduce transaction costs, spread risk and replicate effective approaches. A separate brief will describe this concept. Partnerships with responsible industry can be envisaged to reduce and eliminate single use plastics, create extended producer responsibility schemes at regional scale and underpin a regional circular plastics economy. Several such partnerships already exist, mainly at the national level.

Targeted actions

The following targeted actions are offered for consideration by the governments. The African and Indian Ocean island states Ministers working in close collaboration with the African Union:

- Consider appropriate means of advancing regional action plans to combat marine plastic pollution and plastic pollution in general, including through:
 - (a) existing or planned initiatives by the Abidjan and Nairobi Conventions,
 - (b) coordinated actions by the Regional Economic Communities in cooperation with the African Group of Negotiators on the plastics treaty.
 - (c) actions by the African Ministers Conference on the Environment (AMCEN)
 - (d) and through other appropriate means.
- Invite key sources of financial support for implementation of the SDGs, and SDG14 in particular, to support and participate in dialogues to establish regional mechanisms to finance the implementation of national action plans and implement effective regional cooperation to combat plastic pollution.
- Request the Indian Ocean Commission to coordinate the above actions on behalf of African and Indian Ocean island states.

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References/Further information

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